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Security Council

Seventieth year

Provisional

7419th meeting
Friday, 27 March 2015, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Fabius	(France)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Augusto
	Chad	Mr. Cherif
	Chile	Mr. Labbé Villa
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	Jordan	Mrs. Kawar
	Lithuania	Ms. Murmokaite
	Malaysia	Mrs. Adnin
	New Zealand	Mr. McLay
	Nigeria	Mr. Sarki
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Spain	Mr. García Margallo
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Ellwood
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

The victims of attacks and abuses on ethnic or religious grounds in the Middle East

Letter dated 12 March 2015 from the Charge d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2015/176)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The victims of attacks and abuses on ethnic or religious grounds in the Middle East

Letter dated 12 March 2015 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2015/176)

The President (*spoke in French*): I wish to warmly welcome our friend, the Secretary-General, Ministers and other distinguished representatives present in the Security Council Chamber.

In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Belgium, Botswana, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Colombia, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Hungary, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lebanon, Luxembourg, Morocco, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, the Republic of Korea, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Slovenia, Slovakia, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, the Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine and the United Arab Emirates to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; His Beatitude Louis Raphaël I Sako, Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans; and Mrs. Vian Dakhil, member of the Iraqi Parliament.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome Mr. Al Hussein, who is joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from Geneva.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following individuals to participate in this meeting: His Excellency Mr. Stavros Lambrinidis, European Union Special Representative for Human Rights, and His Excellency Mr. Ufuk Gokcen, Permanent Observer for the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to the United Nations.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations, to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2015/176, a letter dated 12 March 2015 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, transmitting a concept note on the item under consideration.

I now give the floor to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon.

The Secretary-General (*spoke in French*): I thank the French Foreign Minister for convening this high-level debate.

I am deeply concerned about the grave dangers facing minorities in parts of the Middle East. At stake are millions of individual lives and the social fabric of entire countries.

Right now, thousands of civilians are at the mercy of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also known as Daesh. Its fighters are systematically killing ethnic and religious minorities, those who disagree with its warped interpretation of Islam and anyone who opposes its apocalyptic vision. They are targeting women and children with heinous brutality and they are destroying religious and cultural symbols that constitute the heritage of humanity.

We see this spreading in Syria, Iraq and now in Libya — and even Yemen, where the bombing of mosques last week has further fuelled sectarian violence. I condemn in the strongest terms all persecution and violations of the rights to life and physical integrity of individuals and communities based on religious, ethnic, national, racial or other grounds. I urge all parties to ensure the protection of civilians and spare innocent lives.

The members of the Security Council — and all those with influence — must help the people of the region reclaim their historic diversity and dynamism. That is essential to securing our common future.

(*spoke in English*)

The atrocity crimes in the region demand an urgent response. We must end impunity for those committing serious crimes against any and all communities. I also stress again that abuses in counter-terrorism are morally wrong and strategically counterproductive. The commission of atrocities never absolves Governments of their responsibility to honour human rights obligations.

In Iraq, the mission of investigation of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights cited information strongly suggesting that Daesh may have perpetrated genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. My Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and on the Responsibility to Protect warned last August that acts committed by Daesh pointed to the risk of genocide. Now we also see sectarian violence against local populations in areas liberated from its control.

There is strong evidence that members of a number of different minorities have been victims of crimes against humanity, war crimes and other very serious violations and abuses of human rights. That is especially true for women and girls. We must also remember that violent extremism in Iraq precedes Daesh's advance. The underlying conditions must be addressed.

I welcome steps by the Iraqi Government to further national reconciliation, promote inclusion, strengthen social cohesion and reform the security sector. I call on the Government to do more to uphold human rights and restore the rule of law in areas liberated from Daesh. The international community must help Iraq in this effort.

Five years into the conflict in Syria, the lack of accountability has led to an exponential rise in war crimes, crimes against humanity and other human rights violations. Both Government forces and non-State armed groups in Syria, especially Daesh and Jabhat Al-Nusra, have committed such deplorable acts. As we consider the plight of minority communities, we must avoid highlighting differences and reaffirm the values of diversity and peaceful coexistence. I urge the international community, particularly the Security Council, to overcome differences and seek new ways to ensure the protection of all Syrian civilians.

In a few days, I will travel to Kuwait to attend an international pledging conference for Syria. I call on all countries to give generously to help the millions of Syrians who are suffering, and to assist the neighbouring countries that shoulder most of the burden. Such humanitarian assistance is also vital to the region's political stability.

I am deeply concerned about developments in Libya. Daesh-affiliated groups are targeting minorities and attacking religious sites. Amid widespread violence, religious minorities remain highly vulnerable. The main parties must quickly reach agreement to bring an end to the military and political conflict. That is crucial to curb the danger of Libya falling into the hands of terrorist groups. I am also concerned at the ongoing tribal tensions in the South, which could ignite violence along identity lines. No strategy will succeed without strong regional cooperation and an empowered Libyan State.

The United Nations is developing a plan of action on preventing violent extremism, which we will launch in September. We are also strengthening our efforts to champion and protect diversity in the Middle East. I intend to convene a group of respected women and men with deep understanding of the region's religious, civil, cultural, academic and business sectors. They will serve as an advisory panel on inter- and intra-sectarian dynamics.

Governments and parties have the primary responsibility for protecting minorities, but we must engage with partners in civil society, faith leaders and others with influence, including regional and other actors. I especially look to religious and community leaders to clearly remind their followers that religions are about peace, not violence and war.

Next month, the President of the General Assembly and I will invite leaders from different faith communities to a special event at the United Nations. We will build on the experience of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations to promote mutual understanding and reconciliation.

(*spoke in French*)

The Middle East is widely considered the cradle of many of the world's great civilizations. Today, let us resolve to empower people — especially youth — to transform the region into the birthplace of a more stable and secure world.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Al Hussein.

Mr. Al Hussein: Our discussion today — which we welcome and thank you for, Mr President — is a discussion both about tolerance, that breadth of view which acknowledges and embraces the differences between peoples, and its opposite: a maniacal ideology imposing conformity, harsh and cruel.

The Preamble of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court begins:

> "Conscious that all peoples are united by common bonds, their cultures pieced together in a shared heritage, and concerned that this delicate mosaic may be shattered at any time ..."

That mosaic of our heritage is our only hope for permanent peace in the world. The alternative — sharply delineated groups doomed to confrontation — will destroy us. If we are to survive, we need pluralism — societies that are enriched by exchange and grounded in respect.

It is easy to portray the Middle East now as exceptionally fragmented, but in reality the history of the region is marked by long-standing acceptance of multiple identities. The dramatic crises and atrocities that we see today have been fanned into flame by discrimination and by deliberate failures to respect equality and human rights. In Syria, for example, the violent suppression of peaceful protests and, now, civil war are forcing a retreat by many into the shelter of ethnic and religious identities. The once benign, even celebrated differences between communities are now, tragically, being carved into bitter and lethal divisions as the country continues to break apart. Many communities have suffered appalling violence and targeted attacks by all sides, often because of their religious or ethnic affiliation.

As the chaos and violence of Syria bleed across international borders, they have birthed Daesh, a totalitarian-minded Takfiri group determined to silence all dissent. Iraq's exceptionally rich cultural landscape includes communities that have lived in the region since the opening lines of history. But two weeks ago, an investigative mission by my Office found that vicious attacks against the Yazidis by Daesh may amount to genocide. Other communities, as our report also shows, have suffered great violence — including crimes against humanity and war crimes — at the hand of non-State actors and State-affiliated forces. Ancient and deeply significant monuments have been ravaged. All this we condemn.

Daesh is an abomination. An intricately interwoven social fabric in Syria and Iraq is giving way to the demented obliteration of any difference and any choice not in conformity with the taxi world view — which is itself impossibly thin. And yet, in what amounts to a painful paradox and a most terrible irony, Daesh may be more accepting of diverse ethnic origins when it comes to its own members — so long as those same members act in accordance with Takfiri ideology — than many States are when it comes to their own citizens. And how can that be?

The international community's attention to the human rights of minorities is too often both partial and sporadic. It is partial in the sense that States have often focused primarily on communities with which they share specific cultural ties, overlooking abuses of other marginalized communities, and brushing away concerns regarding discriminated groups in their own countries. It is sporadic because the rights of minorities are often highlighted only after the outbreak of extreme violence, even though that eruption is virtually always preceded by years of exclusion, disregard for linguistic and religious rights, and obstacles to full participation in the political, social, cultural and economic life of the State. If we attend to minority rights only after slaughter has begun, then we have already failed.

Fanaticism always finds oxygen and flourishes where tolerance and the universal standards of human rights are battered. It grows in States that betray their people, that fail to respect their own Constitutions, and that do not embrace, genuinely, the ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity of their societies; in States where the voice and participation of all members of society are smothered; in States that attack civil society activists, whose work, ironically, is the very best antidote against the toxin of extremism. To immunize properly against further radicalism, human rights defenders must be promoted and defended, not imprisoned and tortured.

Sadly, there are many such States in the Middle East and other regions, and by their actions they fertilize the soil of intolerance, where extremism takes root. The United Nations Network on Racial Discrimination and Minorities, which my Office coordinates, can help Member States develop strategies to open opportunities to marginalized minority groups and to build in greater protection for their human rights. It is only by insisting

on the dignity and worth of all human beings, securing their rights and their space on this Earth properly and meaningfully, that we will all survive.

The delicate mosaic is being shattered, and the Security Council must take action unanimously and decisively to end the conflicts and refer Iraq and Syria to the International Criminal Court. It must end the fighting in Yemen, Libya and other countries too. Or are we going to have to wait until the strength of the victims, of all humankind, to produce more tears has sapped — when finally only the stones can weep? And what good will it be then? What good will it be to all of us if action never comes, or arrives far too late to be effective?

Without supreme and joint resolve now, the common bond will soon also disappear, along with the cultures stitched by time into one heritage — a debt so dreadful and malignant to our children that I hope it is one we cannot bear to inflict.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Al Hussein for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Patriarch Sako.

Patriarch Sako (*spoke in French*): On behalf of Christians of different ethnic and cultural denominations who are enduring severe trial in the Middle East, I extend my thanks to the French Government — and especially to French Minister for Foreign Affairs Mr. Laurent Fabius — for leading this groundbreaking humanitarian initiative.

As Council members may know, this year is the centenary of the massacres of Christians in 1915. Today, 100 years later, we are experiencing a similarly tragic situation, which has pushed thousands of Christians to emigrate. This is a great loss for all. To speak frankly, the so-called Arab Spring had a negative impact on us. If we had had the opportunity to work in harmony with the mosaic of religions and ethnic groups in our region, there would have been a driving force in the region towards peace, stability, progress and openness throughout the region.

In this Chamber, I would like to convey a message inspired by the spiritual and humanitarian values that animate me. Positive coexistence, on the basis of peace and justice and in the spirit of love and citizenship, should remain utmost priority for the Security Council and the United Nations.

With regard to my country, I call for support for the central Government and the regional government of Kurdistan so as to liberate all Iraqi cities, especially that of Mosul and the towns and villages in the planes of Nineveh, for us Christians, Yezidis and Shabaks alike. I call for international protection of these towns and cities, who were forcibly displaced from their homes. A secure zone should be created and a real estate and property law adopted so as to ensure their rights to their lands, and enable them to return home and resume their normal lives. The central Government should also be responsible to compensate them for the damages incurred.

The major problem lies in an understanding the various components of a State — the way in which religion, citizenship, individuals, the role of woman and national education are seen — in order to live together in peace and respect. The Islamic extremist groups refuse to live with non-Muslims. They are persecuting and uprooting them from their homes and destroying all traces of their history. We are facing a cultural and ideological crisis — a way of monopolizing power, disabling institutions and restricting freedom. It is therefore urgent to establish consistent criteria based on international law.

In addressing the Council, I should stress that terrorists who commit crimes against humanity should not be categorized together with the innocent leaders of Islam. Indeed, the majority of Muslims are silent and peaceful. They reject such politicization of the religion. They are accepting and coexist with others within a secular State and according to the law with respect for all institutions.

It is increasingly clear that peace and stability cannot be achieved solely through military action. Military action, in fact, cannot dismantle this clustered way of thinking that destroys human beings and cultural heritage. What this calls for is that the international community, including the League of Arab States and the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation, take definitive legal measures. For example, they could adopt political, cultural and educational solutions. These solutions should be appropriate to protect the national mosaic comprising individuals, persons and groups regardless of their diverse religions and ethnic backgrounds. The rights of the all citizens must be safeguarded and the relations among citizens strengthened.

I would like to draw the Council's attention to a more significant emerging threat. When millions of children and young people are deprived of schooling and education, and millions of refugees are gathered in camps without special care and attention, there is growing frustration, unemployment and poverty, which could very easily develop into an atmosphere of revenge and openness to extremism. There is therefore a need to provide care for these refugees by responding to their needs and alleviating their suffering. We must undertake a practical process to emerge from this vicious cycle.

First of all, through the United Nations, executive policy should be adopted, based on the updating of the constitutions and laws. This would promote justice, equality and dignity for all citizens without discriminating against one group in a favour of another. It is imperative that our countries acquire secular Governments guaranteeing equality to all citizens. These Governments should be responsible for the protection of all individuals. They must comprehensively protect the rights of all their citizens.

Secondly, religious leaders should be encouraged adopt moderate discourse that deepens the sense of citizenship. No matter what they religious beliefs or ethnic origin may be, they should nurture a feeling of belonging to their national territory, not exclusively to their religious denominations or tribes. A necessary factor is the reform of educational programmes so as to enhance the principles of respect between citizens and to promote tolerance and communication. This would also condemn division, hatred and the desire for revenge. All of this would protect future generations from the consequences of extremism, violence and terrorism. These things cannot be achieved unless the religious hierarchy presents an appropriate exegesis of religious texts, with zero tolerance to extracting religious texts regarding violence from their contexts.

Thirdly, a law should be adopted criminalizing all States and individuals who support terrorist groups, either financially or intellectually, or by providing them with weapons. Their acts are a crime against social peace. They must be held accountable.

Fourthly, we must promote the development of organizations for human rights and promoting civil society. Such organizations should be supported to play a role that is more simply consultative, but rather an executive one, at the regional and international levels alike.

May the Council rest assured of my best wishes for success in its humanitarian mission.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mrs. Vian Dakhil, Member of the Iraqi Parliament.

Mrs. Dakhil (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the Yazidis and all oppressed persons in Iraq, allow me to express my deep thanks and gratitude to His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development of France and to the Government and people of France for the humanitarian stance toward our people. We also wish to express our deep gratitude to Mr. Ban Ki-moon for his commendable efforts to achieve peace in the whole world.

I stand before the Security Council today, not to speak on behalf of the Yazidi population, which has suffered immeasurably in Iraq at the hands of the worst and most dangerous terrorist organisation in the world, but on behalf of Iraqis of all ethnicities, who have paid a huge price due to the aggression of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). I would also like to convey the greetings and best wishes of the Speaker of the Iraqi Parliament, Mr. Salim Al-Jabouri, who wishes this meeting every success. I also bring greetings from the Government and people of the Kurdish region of Iraq along with their hope for the Council's support for any resolution that would help the Iraqi people.

The terrorist organization ISIL constitutes a real threat and danger to international peace and security. Today, Iraqis of all backgrounds and ethnicities are on the front line in facing that threat. I am sad to say that minorities in Iraq — Christians, Yazidis, Shabaks and Turkmen, among others — were that organization's first victims and the groups most gravely affected by their campaign of aggression. They were the ones who directly faced the Iraqi terrorists' guns. They made tremendous sacrifices as a result of the crimes committed against them — crimes unprecedented in the history of the world — which affected women, children and the elderly, and brought back the age of slavery by capturing Yazidi women and turning them into objects for sale. These are crimes that bring shame to all of humankind and that confront the international community not only with a moral responsibility but also the legal one to help free the Iraqi people in general and specifically Iraq's minorities from the grip of terrorism.

No people was spared — not the Christians, not the Yazidis, not the Shabaks, not the Kurds, not the Shia. We have all heard about the crime that took place at Camp Speicher, where 1,500 people were killed in one day. That is clear proof that ISIL has neither religion nor humanity and that it does not belong to Islam, which stands above any crime being committed in its name.

I would like to present the Council with some statistics to illustrate the suffering of the Yazidis. Until 3 August 2014, and prior to ISIL's attack on Mount Sinjar, the Yazidis were a peace-loving, primarily agricultural people whose number was approximately 600,000. Today, 420,000 Yazidis are displaced persons living in camps in the Kurdistan region, with another 8,000 confined to camps in Syria and Turkey. Some 5,680 people, including men, women girls, children and the elderly, have been kidnapped. Almost 1,000 children between the ages of 4 and 10 have been taken by force from their families and are being held in ISIL training camps in order to create a new generation of terrorists. Some 3,000 Yazidi girls have been kidnapped and being sold in slave markets inside and outside Iraq after being violated by all means, including physically and psychologically. The price for one Yazidi girl is $18.

In what age are we living? More than 2,000 Yazidis were slaughtered in cold blood by ISIL and its terrorist personnel for no other reason than that we are Yazidis and profess a religion different from that professed by ISIL. We are being killed. Our women are being raped. Our girls are being sold. Our children are being abducted and taken to places where we have no idea what will become of them. We are bought and sold like goods in the market for no reason.

It is indeed a special opportunity for me appear before the Security Council — our last resort — and to present both our suffering and our hopes. We have been oppressed because of our religion and our faith, because the Takfiri groups consider us infidels. To summarize, what we seek from the Council, first of all, is to define the Yazidis' suffering as a genocide and to adopt a resolution in that regard. Our suffering meets all the criteria for the crime of genocide. Secondly, we ask the Council to impose international protection for minorities where they live, especially the Yazidis, who will not otherwise be able to return to their homeland even if it is liberated after what we have suffered at the hands of ISIL and their supporters. Thirdly, we urge the international community to expedite its campaign to eradicate the terrorist ISIL group, in particular from the Government of Mosul, to enable us to free the more than 3,000 kidnapped Yazidi women who continue to suffer physical and psychological torture. Fourthly, we request the Council to support and arm the Iraqi Army, including the Peshmerga and all Iraqi forces that are fighting ISIL on behalf of the entire world. Fifthly, we ask the international community to undertake the reconstruction of the cities that have been destroyed by terrorism and to redress the results of those terrorist attacks on our communities.

The President (*spoke in French*): I thank Mrs. Dakhil for her very strong statement.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development of France.

I shall speak in no uncertain terms. In the Middle East, we are facing a barbaric and systematic process of ethnic and religious eradication. While, in their sheer number, Muslims are the primary victims of Jihadist terrorism, non-Muslim communities find themselves especially targeted. They embody the type of diversity that Daesh wants to eliminate. Christians, Yazidis, Turkmen, Kurds and Shabak are all threatened by what I would call a triangle of horror: forced exile, enslavement and death.

Because of its history, France has deep ties with Eastern Christians as well as a long tradition of protecting minorities. We intend to stay faithful to what are the tenets of the French nation.

In Iraq, as has been clearly described, upon the capture of Mosul last summer, Christians were hunted down. In Syria, the situation is tragic: nearly 220 Assyrian Christians were kidnapped by Daesh in the northern region of Hasaka. Persecution has extended beyond the official boundaries of the Middle East. Last month in Libya, 21 Coptic Egyptians were beheaded. Daesh would like to continue growing its network of terror. While I have mentioned the targeting of Christians, Daesh attacks all minorities with the same inhumanity. For instance, the Yazadis besieged on Mount Sinjar or Kurds targeted in Kobani especially come to mind. Their barbarism strikes even the artefacts that symbolize diversity — what the High Commissioner referred to as the mosaic. These terrorists ransacked the museum in Mosul and attacked the ancient Assyrian city of Nimrod and the Parthian city of Hatra. They not only want to erase the present, but physically destroy

its roots — they would like history not to begin before or without them.

The danger of Daesh's enterprise is that of the total disappearance of minorities. We are the international community; we must no longer remain collectively a powerless force. For that reason, from this Chamber, I would like to send a dual message — one of solidarity with the persecuted and one of determination against the terrorists, what the High Commissioner called an abomination. We must show to the minorities in the Middle East that we are on their side and on the side of States respectful of diversity. We must let the terrorists of Daesh know that we will fight them relentlessly and defeat them.

During the last few months, the world has tried to respond to the humanitarian emergency in order to save these minorities from death. While these efforts obviously remain needed, we can all see that they are not enough. The minorities are not asking for favours, but rather they are demanding their rights. Our mission must be the return of displaced minorities to their homes. In that pursuit, all means must be used.

First, there must be humanitarian support. The situation is dire. Our collective efforts should enable exiled minorities to return home in safety and dignity. United Nations agencies, especially the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), plays an outstanding and major role. We believe it should concentrate its efforts on such support. Member States must meaningfully strengthen their financial support, which is absolutely essential. Specifically, I propose that we set up a specific return assistance fund that would help with the reconstruction of homes and places of worship.

Accordingly, we should take the same approach to military action. As Daesh retreats, we need to enable minorities to return to the areas they had to leave. This means that the presently deployed ground troops must help secure their return, because without security there will be no sustainable return. In areas still not yet liberated, France wants the coalition, in conjunction with the Iraqi authorities, on the one hand, and the moderate Syrian opposition, on the other hand, to make the return of minorities part of its strategy. In tandem with the anti-Jihadist struggle, the preservation of minorities in Iraq and Syria must become a key objective of the military effort of the coalition and local forces.

I would also like to reiterate my country's commitment to combating impunity. We call upon the States of the region that have not yet done so to adhere to the Rome Statute in order that the International Criminal Court can prosecute the perpetrators of these crimes. Even if this raises legal issues, given the irreversible destruction committed, we believe that cultural genocide should be included in the scope of crimes against humanity. Perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity must be prosecuted — and in particular Daesh terrorists. We believe it is essential that the Security Council refer such matters to the International Criminal Court.

More generally, we all know that only an overall political solution will allow for the sustainable and peaceful return of minorities. That is why the international community must support the consolidation of States that are the guarantors of the coexistence of all segments of society, rather than advocates of a single community, because, as has been well said, sectarianism breeds extremism. Only inclusive States, protecting diversity and providing everyone with full citizenship, are able to restore the confidence of the people, especially minorities. Through this concept of inclusiveness, ensuring a place for minorities is at the heart of the solution to these crises. I will give three examples.

In Iraq, the response to terrorists has been a process of unification and reconciliation, initiated by Prime Minister Al-Abadi; but those efforts must be increased. This is the prerequisite for a united, stable and peaceful Iraq.

In Syria, the issue of minorities is unfortunately manipulated by a Power that has used the Jihadist threat to erect a supposed bulwark against terrorism that it itself triggered and colludes with. In this case as well, only an inclusive political solution that includes both the regime and the opposition and that serves to protect the various communities, will lead to a meaningful democratic transition and ensure the rights of each and every one in future.

In Lebanon, the model of coexistence among the communities established by the Constitution, the National Covenant and the Taif Agreement is challenged by the current institutional paralysis. We call upon the Lebanese to elect, as soon as possible, a President who will ensure the preservation of that model.

I know that comparisons may be misleading, but let us remember Yugoslavia: the collapse of the State that protected minorities caused a resurgence of violence against them. Today, I propose and request on behalf of my country that the Secretary-General submit to the Security Council a charter of action to address the situation of minorities in the Middle East. The international community needs a detailed road map to implement its response.

Such a charter could be organized around the four components that I mentioned, and which other speakers have addressed. The first is humanitarian assistance: the action of United Nations agencies, especially UNHCR, must be even more focused on the return of minorities. Secondly, on the military level, the issue of return and the security of minorities must be integrated into the strategy of the coalition and local forces. Thirdly, in the fight against impunity, the perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity must be tried by the International Criminal Court. Finally, politically, we must strengthen the unifying policy in Iraq and promote an inclusive political transition in Syria. I am thinking here of Libya, of Yemen and other places, where we hope for Governments and States that are inclusive.

I want to warmly welcome the announcement made by the Secretary-General on the establishment of an advisory panel of experts to look into this crucial issue. I propose that their priority task, if he agrees, should be to draw up a plan of action. France is prepared to host an international conference focusing on the presentation of the panel's findings.

Public opinion — by that I mean that of ordinary citizens — is wondering how so many countries gathered here together, who call themselves the United Nations, have so far been unable to confront the threat of terrorism and eradicate it. Those citizens are right. This meeting of the Council will have been useful if it serves not simply as a warning cry, but also as a specific call for action, action focused on a single goal: to preserve the 2,000 year-old diversity in the entire region and to enable persecuted minorities to return permanently to their lands.

That is the appeal, one of gravity and hope, that I want to make today on behalf of France.

I shall now give the floor to the other members of the Security Council.

Mr. García Margallo (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): This is the first time that I participate in an open debate of the Security Council since Spain became a non-permanent member on 1 January. It is a worthy opportunity for me to do so since the matter that brings us here today is of extreme gravity.

My first words are of emotion and respect. I was moved by the testimony we heard, which will resonate for years in this Chamber. The voices we heard are the voices of people of goodwill, people immune to hatred and the desire for revenge. Their words of brotherhood are raised against the intolerable harassment, the irreparable pain and the humiliation inflicted. These voices speak for the elderly and for men, women and children who have been persecuted, expelled from their lands or massacred; they are the voices of the inhabitants of the Middle East, the cradle of civilizations, the source of spirituality and wisdom; they are the voices of a region that is the heritage of all of humankind and that today, more than ever, is being torn apart because of the utter disregard for life and human dignity.

Their suffering does not leave us unmoved. Their presence here today at the United Nations gives us greater dignity, it humanizes us and makes us stronger. We owe them our admiration and gratitude. They embody the best of the human condition. On behalf of Spain, which I am honoured today to represent on behalf of its King, its Government and its people, I want to reach out to them and extend my fraternal greetings filled with affection to each and everyone of the members of the communities that they represent.

Now let me ask: what is the reason for this debate. Why are we here? I think the reason is that we run the certain risk that the rich and pluralistic Middle East will disappear. The Middle East is more than a geostrategic space of the first order. It is also a melting pot of races, cultures and beliefs. It is the cradle of the three great monotheistic religions practiced by most of the inhabitants of this planet. But it is also the region that gave birth to Yazidism and the Baha'i, Druze and Ismailist faiths and Mandaeism. Much earlier, the region witnessed the rise of Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism and Mithraism.

The jihadist terrorism of Daesh threatens to annihilate the diversity that is inherent to the region. Just as we express without any reservavtion our most emphatic rejection and condemnation of jihadist terrorism, we cannot and must not allow for that

phenomenon to be confused with Islam. jihadism has manipulated and twisted the message of Islam. It has kidnapped it and held it hostage, creating a violent, cruel, totalitarian, oppressive and expansionist ideology. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of the victims of jihadist terror are Muslims.

The fight against jihadist terrorism is not the manifestation of a conflict between Islam and the West, nor is it a clash of civilizations. Rather, it is a confrontation between civilization, with all of its manifestations of freedom, creativity and diversity, and mass barbarism, which aspires to reduce the individual to an object subject to brutality. It is that simple; it is that terrible.

Expressed in such terms, the debate affects not only individuals living in the Middle East, but each and every one of us, and each and every one of our nations.

The French presidency of the Council has most appropriately convened this debate. Not only is it timely. It is also a moral and political obligation. It is not enough for us to express our indignation, or express our regret or pain because of so many dreadful crimes. The victims and the entire international community expect that the Council will act with unity, determination and intelligence against barbarism and hatred. We have been doing this. Today's meeting should lead to a new, determined step forward in this endeavour.

I wish to express Spain's full support for the important statement of the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon. I fully endorse his statement. The guidelines that he lays out for us are certain and necessary, especially those that refer to the establishment of an advisory panel of experts to advise on peaceful coexistence among communities of different faiths. The scourge of terrorism must be fought on many fronts. We must make greater efforts to prevent the radicalization and recruitment of young people. We must counter the falsehoods in the terrorists' discourse. We must close off their sources of financing. We must promote harmony among peoples and communities of different faiths. The action plan that the Secretary-General has presented to us contains guidelines for the entire international community. All of us, all of us members, have to work for it to be implemented and we, especially at the Council, must ensure that it is complied with.

For Spain, today's theme is an absolute priority — first, because we have experienced at first hand the scourge of terrorism. We are well aware of the suffering of the victims. We know how important it is to hear their voices in devising strategies aimed at countering terrorism. Secondly, Spain has set the protection and promotion of human rights, the responsibility to protect and the fight against terrorism as the essential axes of its foreign policy.

Experience and effectiveness also counsel the adoption of a multidisciplinary approach that addresses the root causes of barbarity and injustice. Spain is promoting various actions within the framework of its foreign policy to promote intercultural and interreligious understanding. The Alliance of Civilizations is an instrument of dialogue among religions and peoples in the fight against radicalism. Together with Austria, we are among the founders of the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue. It is urgent for both initiatives to deploy their full potential.

The United Nations system must incorporate those issues into its daily work in a cross-cutting manner. Indeed, at the latest forum of the Alliance of Civilizations, held in Bali, Indonesia, last September, I made a series of specific proposals that, I believe, it is appropriate to recall here. I proposed the creation of a platform of religious leaders for peace in conflict areas, where action is most urgently needed, including Syria, Israel-Palestine and in Iraq. Religion, as I have stated, must build peace rather than cause division.

Secondly, I proposed the establishment of a team of expert mediators in intercultural and interreligious affairs who can support the mediation, negotiation and dialogue efforts of United Nations envoys and resident coordinators and political missions on the ground.

Thirdly, I suggested, and now reiterate, the inclusion of intercultural and interreligious experts in United Nations peacekeeping operations. The difficult transition from conflict to peace calls for multidimensional operations adapted to the new political challenges and realities.

Lastly, I proposed, and continue to propose, that the peacebuilding agenda, which is closely linked to the idea of reconciliation and is currently under review, should incorporate aspects of intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

The time has come to turn to a new page in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism. Our focus must be global, daring, flexible and fully

respectful of human rights and the most sacred principles of humankind. We must ensure that mass crimes and abuses of fundamental human rights do not go unpunished, and must establish a solid foundation to ensure accountability for perpetrators. We must also cauterize, at its very source, the hemorrhage being caused by fanaticism in many societies. We must use the truth to combat lies and manipulation, and education to fight ignorance, and we must undertake an active campaign to unmask extremism.

I want to make two clear, specific proposals. We call on the Secretary-General to immediately implement the action plan that he has just presented. I also submit, for his consideration, that he should appoint, within the Secretariat and using existing resources, a Special Representative endowed with a mandate to combat violent extremism. The Special Representative could, on his behalf, coordinate policies against the fanaticism and extremism feeding terrorism. He or she would work in close coordination with the High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations and take into account the Alliance's valuable legacy.

We also propose the establishment of a specialized international jurisdictional mechanism to bring to trial those responsible for crimes committed out of violent extremism. The objective of justice and the fight against impunity cannot be renounced, as highlighted by resolution 2170 (2014).

I conclude by gratefully expressing thanks for the convening of this debate. We are facing a conflict between totalitarianism and humankind's plurality, between intolerance and the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. Our commitment must be complete, because we are facing a totalitarian threat. Somebody must stop that madness, and that somebody is us — the United Nations. Spain assures the Council of its full support and willingness in that task.

Mr. Ellwood (United Kingdom): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's important debate on the victims of attacks and abuses on ethnic or religious grounds in the Middle East. I also thank the Secretary-General and all of the briefers for their thoughtful and sobering statements.

Last week I had the somber privilege of speaking alongside Kurdish friends at the United Kingdom event marking the chemical attack in Halabja, Iraq, in 1988. On 14 April, the United Kingdom will mark Anfal Memorial Day. As a former soldier, I served in Northern Ireland, the Middle East and on mainland Europe, including in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I have seen at first hand the devastating and enduring impact of attacks against ethnic and religious groups.

My message today is this: the key to ending the suffering of ethnic and religious groups in the Middle East is leadership — bold leadership that promotes tolerance and stands up against hatred; leadership that brings groups together, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, belief, gender or sexual orientation, and enables their full participation in society.

I welcome the Secretary-General's announcement today of the establishment of an advisory panel of experts, and Foreign Minister Fabius' proposal for a conference to consider the findings of the panel.

We look to the future, but we can also learn from the past. The past gives us hope, and the Middle East, described by Foreign Minister José Manuel García Margallo as the cradle of civilizations, has long been admired for its history of tolerance and cosmopolitanism and for being what His Beatitude described as a mosaic of religions.

Before Daesh began its brutal war against the citizens of Iraq and Syria, Assyrians and Yazidis had lived for millenniums alongside the Muslim majority. Even in the recent past, leaders have boldly stepped forth in the spirit of reconciliation and tolerance. In 1977, for example, Egyptian President Sadat stunned the world when he became the first Arab leader to visit Israel. Initially seen as an unpopular move after so many years of conflict, it fundamentally changed the relationship for the better.

But, in 2015, Daesh's actions have underlined the urgent need for today's moderate voices and bold leaders to make themselves heard. Daesh is slaughtering Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Their cruelty knows no bounds. The recent United Nations report on Iraq describes Daesh's widespread abuses, including killings, torture, rape and sexual slavery, forced religious conversions and the conscription of children, along with other horrific stories. For example, my parliamentary colleague from Iraq, Mrs. Vian Dakhil, articulated in her extremely passionate speech how Yazidi girls and women are openly sold or handed over as gifts to Daesh ministers, with witnesses describing the screams of girls as young as six and nine as they were raped by Daesh fighters.

Daesh is also destroying our shared cultural history. As was mentioned by the President of the Council, the ancient Assyrian city of Nimrud was bulldozed. The human-headed bull statutes of ancient Nineveh were literally defaced by pneumatic drill, and priceless artifacts have been sold to fund Daesh's brutality. But as the problem is wider than Daesh, our response must be broad as well. Under articles 18 and 20 of the International Convenant on Civil and Political Rights, each United Nations State Member has a duty to protect all of its people. But how should we support that in the Middle East? We must degrade and ultimately defeat Daesh, working through the global coalition. As the United Kingdom's Minister for the Middle East, a large proportion of my time has been devoted to the diplomatic efforts.

The other immediate priority is the appalling humanitarian crisis that is taking place across Syria and Iraq, where 11.4 million Syrians and over 2.5 million Iraqis have fled their homes. The United Kingdom has been at the forefront, helping to protect the Yazidis on Mount Sinjar, contributing $12 billion to the Syrian crisis, and nearly $60 million to Iraq.

With over 220,000 killed and over 2 million people displaced in Syria, a generation is being denied the education that they need and deserve. One day the guns will fall silent in Syria, and the international community must do its part to help educate free Syrians and refugees so that there are, for example, doctors, farmers, teachers and civil servants to help the country get off its knees. We need others to step up urgently at the pledging conference that will take place in Kuwait next week. That is the opportunity to do so. However more must be done to address the sexual violence and conflict, and to support survivors. That is why we hosted the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict last June, and produced an international protocol on the documentation and investigation of sexual violence in conflict.

The Iraqi Government is the first in the region to have a national action plan on women and peace and security; but it needs our international support. To that end, the United Kingdom and Canada recently set up a scoping mission to Iraq, and are working with the Iraqi Government to implement the recommendations. However, the best defence against radicalization, the best guarantee of stability and sustainable growth the world over, is inclusive and accountable Government. That will not happen overnight. It will not happen in a year or, indeed, a decade. It will be the work of a generation. But it is work that is crucial nonetheless. In Britain, we have learned this the hard way. The Magna Carta, whose eight hundredth anniversary we mark this year, did not create a free and just society overnight. Rather it was a critical step in an incremental process, peppered with setbacks, civil wars and religious persecution, towards the parliamentary democracy we know today. But while the work in the Middle East could take a generation, we must not let it take eight centuries.

In the past, ideas could travel only as fast as a person on a horse spreading the word from town to town. Now ideas can be shared with the touch of a button. We can, and must, be quicker to foster such ideas to enable the creation of inclusive, representative Governments. On that note, I should also say we should be mindful of how modern technology, the Internet, is being hijacked to promote extremism and incite violence. We all have a role to play in tackling extremism. For example, I commend the exceptional work in Lebanon of Mufti Deryan, who I met recently, to build bridges between faith communities to end extremism and terror. We must give our full support to the Middle East peace process and to the two-State solution to prevent more suffering and an uncertain and dangerous future for Israelis and Palestinians alike. We must also continue to seek peace in Syria. We should not fall for the regime's specious argument that it can protect minorities. Al-Assad's actions have fuelled sectarian violence, and his regime is ultimately responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of civilians. The Syrian people deserve a more accountable, inclusive, representative form of governance than Al-Assad could ever offer.

We, the international community, must heed early warnings and seek to prevent atrocities before they begin, as we did last year in the Central African Republic. But where preventative action fails or comes too late, then there must be no impunity for perpetrators. Justice is neither easy nor quick, but it is essential. From Rwanda to Yugoslavia, South Africa to Northern Ireland, history has shown that peace can be built only on accountability and justice.

Finally, we must counter Daesh's twisted narrative through education and good governance. We need to underline the responsibility of authorities and civil society alike to support counternarratives and tackle what the High Commissioner for Human Rights calls the toxins of extremism. And we must engage and

empower women to help build the secure, stable and prosperous Middle East that we all want. We call on the Governments in the region to guarantee freedom of religion for all their people, as laid down in article 18 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. When children are brought up to respect followers of all religions, and of none, extremist ideologies will wither and die.

In conclusion, during this United Nations anniversary year, let us take inspiration from its founders and our shared history. Let our bold leaders, whether of countries or indeed of communities, continue doing the vital work for tolerance and reconciliation. To those leaders, I will end with this: as together we tackle Daesh, as we address the humanitarian crisis in Syria, as we build a more stable, inclusive and more prosperous Middle East, they should know that they have the support of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Augusto (Angola) (*spoke in French*): The delegation of Angola congratulates the French presidency of the Security Council for holding this debate on attacks and abuses against ethnic and religious minorities in the Middle East. We welcome and thank Mr. Laurent Fabius, Minister for Foreign Affairs of France, for presiding over this debate.

(*spoke in English*)

At present, in many countries — namely, Syria, Iraq, Libya, South Sudan and the Central African Republic, just to mention a few — the international community is once again faced with its inability to quickly and effectively protect and respond to the humanitarian needs of ethnic and religious minorities. We, the international community, should conduct some soul searching and ask some crucial questions. Do we really believe in the protection of minorities, of the disadvantaged and those marginalized by abuse and persecution? What should we do differently in order to prevent mass killings and the persecution of minorities?

As recent events show, the political turmoil in the Middle East and North Africa has a devastating impact on minority groups. Egyptian Copts, Israeli Arabs, Iraqi and Syrian Kurds, Palestinians in Jordan, Saudi Shia Muslims, Assyrian Christians, Turkmen and Yazidis are some of the groups facing increasing hostility at the hands of extremist groups, and even from Government institutions.

Most worrisome is the fact that violent extremism, religious and ethnic intolerance seem to be gaining ground in the Middle East and elsewhere, with minorities being subjected to brutal persecution by extremists and terrorist groups that endanger the future of those societies by breaking down the social fabric of the communities and countries they have lived for centuries. Acts of persecution, including targeted killings, forced religious conversions, abductions, forced evictions, slavery, sexual and physical abuse, torture and the harassment of entire communities on the basis of ethnic or religious affiliation are having a disastrous effect on the collective perceptions of the people affected.

Another cause for great concern is the rapid advance of radical militant groups such as Daesh in Iraq, Syria and other parts of the Middle East and North Africa. Those terrorist organizations, while significantly threatening the territorial integrity of the countries throughout the region, have been outspoken in their hatred of other religious or ethnic minorities. This dangerous spread of Jihadist and Salafist ideology in the Middle East and North Africa is unsettling the centuries-old coexistence of religious and ethnic communities and creating an environment of mistrust and intolerance, which only leads to further conflict.

The members of the Security Council have condemned, in the strongest terms, the widespread and grave violations of humanitarian and human rights law committed by Daesh against ethnic, religious and other minority groups, while reiterating their support to the protection of civilians, including minorities, in accordance with international humanitarian law and the standards set out in international legal instruments on human rights and the rights of refugees. However, none of the Conventions, statements or resolutions adopted by the Security Council seem to have the desired effect in places where war is raging and the most egregious human rights abuses occur. These normative documents tend to lose their weight without the strong political will of the Security Council to enforce its decisions by all necessary means.

The threat posed by the radical extremists has to be matched and, in addition to the use of force, a clear ideological response must be provided, including through communication technologies, that counters their propaganda at every turn and reduces their capacity to mobilize youth to their sinister ends. Additionally, the promotion of a culture of tolerance, inclusion and

common understanding is key to ensuring different but equal coexistence with other human beings. In that regard, there arises the need to assist the peoples of the Middle East to peacefully resolve the issues of coexistence among diverse communities in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Palestine, among other places, and join the fight against radical elements whose only purpose is to promote hatred and division.

The Republic of Angola therefore supports the action plan announced by His Excellency the Secretary-General this morning for a new and urgent approach to the question of minorities. In the same vein, we recognize the importance and the pertinence of the proposals made by you, Mr. President, on the implementation of concrete actions to address the prevailing situation of minorities in the Middle East.

The United Nations is at a crossroads, and the Security Council has enormous responsibilities ahead on which it must deliver in order to safeguard its very nature and relevancy in the twenty-first century. The challenge is enormous because we must take a definite stand against armed groups such as Boko Haram, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant Daesh and others, which threaten entire societies and communities that have for so long coexisted in peace and harmony. However, promoting a culture of tolerance and common understanding will be possible only with political stability, economic prosperity and policies for real political, social and economic inclusion, particularly for the youth. In that regard, we must continue to assist the peoples of the Middle East to peacefully resolve the conflicts in the region and bring about all the positive changes proclaimed by the Arab Spring.

Mr. Labbé Villa (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of Chile, I join Minister García-Margallo y Marfil in warmly welcoming those who have come to the Security Council today speak for the victims — those massacred simply because they were different, because they were practicing their faith and because they did not fit into an insane paradigm that defies all the values that underpin the Organization.

We are grateful to France for convening this open debate, which Chile believes addresses central components of a holistic understanding of peace and international security. Such an understanding is people-centred and therefore must always uphold human dignity. It is in that context that we approach the issue of the rights of minorities. This is also an opportunity to reflect on the extensive and systematic persecution perpetrated by the Islamic State, or Daesh, of communities and individuals belonging to certain ethnic, religious or sectarian minorities. Their actions are exacerbating the climate of insecurity that unfortunately prevails in the region and its resulting global humanitarian impact, which the United Nations system is politically, legally and ethically bound to address through the Council.

Chile, which strongly supports the doctrine of interdependence among the three pillars of the United Nations — peace and security, human rights and development — is also committed to respect for human dignity and unity in diversity. In that framework, the multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious character of many States — not only those in the Middle East — is a global public good to be preserved rather than just being a descriptive footnote. The preservation of ethnic, religious and cultural diversity is an imperative of civilization.

Therefore, at the present stage of the development of human civilization, active religious tolerance, which stems from the inherent right of people to espouse a religious belief, not to espouse one or to convert to another belief, emerges as an essential attribute of human dignity and serves to establish freedoms that we must guarantee and fully respect.

With regard to the Middle East, we must denounce the cruel opportunism of the violence unleashed against religious minorities who have from time immemorial been part of the social, economic and even political fabric of the region. Indeed, no community can survive and develop over the decades, centuries and even millennums in the midst of other majority communities unless there are and have been deep-rooted ties, both explicit and implicit, of belonging and coexistence. Such a coexistence of spiritual poles, viewed over time, has but enriched the civilizations of the region, in which my own country too can claim spiritual, ethnic and cultural ancestors. Chile reiterates in this Chamber the inalienable right of those communities to live in their own countries in peace, freedom, full equality and dignity.

The specific situation in which the Christian communities of the Middle East find themselves is a source of special concern, particularly in view of the structural role played by Christian Arabs in the ideological construction and definition of secular Arab

identity. The disappearance or virtual exile from the region of those communities would, in the medium term, result in the collapse of Arab secularism, and therefore create a risk that democratic principles would be eradicated in the Middle East and North Africa. Based on that reasoning, with other delegations in the Council, Chile co-sponsored the joint statement entitled "Supporting the Human Rights of Christians and other Communities, Particularly in the Middle East", initiated by the Russian Federation, the Holy See and Lebanon on behalf of 64 States in the context of the twenty-eighth session of the Human Rights Council, and the "Joint Concurrence Statement on Persecution of Minority Communities in the Middle East", spearheaded by the United States, endorsed by 40 other States and expressing concern about all minority groups, including Muslims.

In various statements to the Council concerning the Islamic State, our delegation has stressed the importance of respecting and guaranteeing the human rights of religious, ethnic and cultural minorities, pursuant to resolution 2170 (2014), adopted on 15 August 2014. From its seat in the Security Council, Chile has strongly supported all collective actions by the international community to combat terrorism and violent extremism, without needing to note that terrorism, as a threat to international peace and security, cannot be eliminated by military means alone.

During its past presidency of the Council, Chile wished to share its perceptions and concerns regarding the profound causes of the conflict, emphasizing, on the basis of the interdependence among the three pillars of the multilateral system, the links between inclusive development and the maintenance of international peace and security. Indeed, President Michelle Bachelet stated on 19 January in this forum:

> "In order to understand and tackle those new challenges, we must adopt a multidimensional approach that explains the causes underlying those threats. Those include socioeconomic, gender, ethnic, tribal, religious and ideological tensions that may have local, regional or global effects. That is the only way by which we can effectively contribute to conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the world." (*S/PV.7362, p. 6*)

The crimes perpetrated by the Islamic State and the terrorist groups that have sworn allegiance to it not only deserve our resounding condemnation, without any falsely justifying overtones, but also require our collective action aimed at the total eradication of this modern scourge that is undermining the very foundation of civilization. As others have said in the course of this debate, impunity is not an option. And, as the Secretary-General has noted, we are faced with an abomination, an abomination that certainly leads to desolation. We in the Council and the multilateral system are indebted to the religious and ethnic minorities in the Middle East and Africa. Success will be possible only if we are united around profound convictions and effective mechanisms. Only then will the sacrifice of the martyrs of the Levant have redeeming value.

Mrs. Kawar (Jordan) (*spoke in French*): I thank the delegation of France for having organized this debate.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

Allow me to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon; the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein; the Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans, Mr. Louis Raphaël I Sako; and member of the Iraqi Parliament, Mrs. Vian Dakhil. I would like to tell Mrs. Dakhil that her words were difficult for all of us to hear, especially for me, as a woman and as an Arab.

Numerous conflicts and daunting challenges confront us in the Middle East region, whether we are Muslims, Christians, Sunnis or Shiites. Many developments over the centuries have prompted us to seek to establish good governance, moderation and tolerance. However, the region has never witnessed the new kind of terrorism — assassinations and killings, rape, forced displacements, persecution of religious and ethnic minorities. This terrorism is amplified in hate speeches and the misuse of religion for political reasons. The heinous violence and crimes committed by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) deliberately and systematically target religious and ethnic minorities, notably Christians, Turkmen, Kurds, Assyrians, Sabians, Mandeans and Kakais, with the aim of annihilating those minorities as a group and depopulating the region by direct killing or by spreading fear among the populations.

Among the terrorist crimes perpetrated against religious and ethnic groups are those of torture, rape, women and girls enslaved and others forced to work as combatants, suicide bombers, executioners, sex slaves or forced workers. I would like to say that all of those crimes and violations are new to our societies

in the Middle East region. Our region has historically been known for its pluralism, tolerance, coexistence and acceptance of others despite the fact that there were many faiths, religions and sects living in the region since time immemorial. Are these war crimes, crimes against humanity or crimes of genocide? Such terms indeed describe what we currently see. The real challenge that our societies currently face is to hold perpetrators accountable, deter and prevent impunity by imposing punishment. We want to prevent the recurrence of such crimes; therefore, we must monitor and document the violations against ethnic or religious minorities by extremist armed groups, with a view to holding accountable those who have committed or ordered such crimes, particularly those who have committed operations of sexual violence against, or mass kidnappings of, girls and women, which is what happened with the Yazidis recently.

We must create a mechanism to document the immovable assets and wealth that armed groups have seized from minorities. Needless to say, States must provide protection to their religious and ethnic minorities. We also stress the need for States not to discriminate among its citizens on the basis of religion, faith or sect. The Middle East region will never enjoy peace and security unless efforts to combat extremism and extremist thoughts are pursued in tandem with joint, serious efforts to address the root causes of such phenomena and the expansion of terrorist groups, or unless the core questions of the region are addressed, particularly the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Syrian crisis. Ignoring our responsibility to seek permanent solutions to such crises does not only encourage terrorism but will prevent us from the achieving stability.

We must also fight hate crimes and address the root causes of the attraction that terrorist organizations have for young people. This popularity has allowed terrorist organizations to promote their extremist ideologies. We must recall that provocative actions against Muslims will lead only to fomenting hate speech, because any defamation of a religion or its followers is totally extraneous to freedom of thought and expression. There is a fine line between the exercise of freedom and fomenting and inciting hate speech. This obdurate racism and Islamophobic discourse are the best propaganda for ISIS, Al-Qaida and other extremist organizations.

Jordan, under the leadership of His Highness King Abdullah II, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and the protector of Islamic sites and the Islamic religion, has supported every effort to protect religious minorities, safeguard the Christian and Arab identities and preserve the right to worship freely based on the common denominators of Islam and Christianity. His Highness said that the Christians of the region are closer to understanding Islam because they form part and parcel of our Arab societies and have played an effective role in building our culture and our civilization. Minorities do not represent only a faith or a language; they are representative of many cultures, because they are the common denominator of the value of the region in which they live. The historical wealth of eastern civilization is therefore the result of the diversity and harmony among the region's components, which has provided fertile ground for the development of the culture of our region.

Jordan has stressed its policy of tolerance and respect for religion in many initiatives, including the Amman message, the proposal to proclaim World Interfaith Harmony Week, and the initiative entitled "A common word", on the common denominator between Islam and Christianity, which is love of God and love of neighbour. That is because we in Jordan believe in our religious and ethical duty to protect minorities in Iraq and Syria and other parts of the middle East. As we have always done in the conflicts to which our region has been exposed and because we wanted to provide safe haven to the weak, we in Jordan hosted more than 2,000 Christians from Iraq who had sought safe haven in Jordan following the terror that they had to endure from ISIS and other groups.

In conclusion, diversity in society is natural, and therefore building societies that are stable and live in harmony is not only an ambition of the people of the Middle East but also a usurped right that we hope to recover, so that we can enjoy it the way we did in the past.

Mrs. Adnin (Malaysia): Malaysia joins other Council members in warmly welcoming you, Mr. President, and other high-level dignitaries to the Council and to today's meeting. We commend you and the delegation of France for having convened this important open debate at this crucial juncture for all the communities in the Middle East.

My delegation takes this opportunity to express appreciation to His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, the Secretary-General, and to His Highness Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, for sharing their perspectives and insights on the topic at hand.

We also thank His Beatitude Louis Raphaël I Sako, Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans, and The Honourable Mrs. Vian Dakhil, member of the Iraqi Parliament, for being with us today and for bringing their perspectives as victims directly affected by the wave of violent extremism in the Middle East today. We are humbled by their fortitude in the face of such trying circumstances.

The landscape of threats to international peace and security has evolved significantly since the establishment of the Council. Accordingly, the Council's responses must continue to evolve and take into account the changing nature of the threats faced. The scourge of terrorism and violent extremism stands out as one of the most prominent and challenging threats we face today. In that connection, Malaysia recalls Council resolutions 2170 (2014), 2178 (2014) and 2199 (2015), which are among the most recent responses by the Council and reaffirm its commitment to their implementation and that of other relevant resolutions.

We are pleased to note the Secretary-General's proposal on the plan of action to combat fanaticism and violent extremism, and we welcome France's leadership in taking this proposal forward through the proposed international conference.

It is tragic and disconcerting that the deadly consequences of the twin scourges of terrorism and violent extremism, fuelled by the fires of radicalization and hatred, have spread and seemingly become entrenched in the Middle East, a region known as the cradle of civilization.

Malaysia condemns in the strongest possible terms the outrageous and senseless acts perpetrated by violent extremists against ethnic or religious minorities, wherever and whenever they occur. We denounce and reject totally the ideology propagated by the likes of Al-Qaida, Boko Haram, Daesh, Ansar Al-Sharia, the Al-Nusra Front and other groups or individuals of similar persuasion. We especially reject their claims that their heinous and barbaric acts of violence are carried out in the name of Islam, a religion of peace.

To the victims, we can but attempt to assuage their grief and despair by reaffirming and reassuring them of our continuing strong commitment to combat those scourges, including through the implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Malaysia wishes to reaffirm its commitment to continue working in a coordinated and concerted manner with all partners and stakeholders in combating terrorism and violent extremism in the framework of the United Nations and other relevant international and regional organizations.

The current wave of extremist violence in the Middle East, particularly in Iraq and Syria and other parts of Middle East, affects all communities irrespective of creed or ethnicity, whether Christian, Yazidi, Kurd, Shia or Sunni. These are communities which have for the most part lived in peace, side by side with one another, for centuries, if not millennia.

The advent of violent extremists and their particular brand has resulted in deep fractures among those communities from which they may never recover. As such, while it may seem an impossible task at this particular juncture, we must remain mindful of the need to maintain and strengthen the common ties and linkages between them in order to build a better future for the next generation.

At the same time, we also wish to highlight the situation of the Palestinian-Arab citizens of Israel. The Palestinian minority in Israel has suffered continuously from racial discrimination and inequality, much of it officially legislated and sanctioned by the Government. At least 40 different laws are currently in place that in essence discriminate against the Israeli Palestinian population, whether Muslim or Christian, affecting schools, communities, land ownership and other rights. Palestinians in Israel are relegated to the status of second-class citizens and are victims of segregation and displacement.

Impunity, wherever it may occur, breeds hatred and vengeance. In this regard, we echo the appeal made by earlier speakers that efforts and initiatives aimed at establishing accountability must be fully supported by the international community. The perpetrators of extremist violence must realize that there will be consequences for their despicable actions.

Malaysia reaffirms the primary responsibility of Governments to ensure the safety and security

of their citizens and the promotion and protection of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of their peoples, including minorities. We realize that for certain countries, especially those just emerging from conflict or in a transition process, the key challenges they face include establishing and maintaining strong governance and law-enforcement institutions that will enable them to ensure their peoples' safety and security regardless of creed or ethnicity. At the same time, those institutions should be able to foster conditions conducive to people's socioeconomic development and the promotion and protection of their human rights. We believe that the international community, and the United Nations in particular, has a critical supporting role to play in that regard.

As a multi-ethnic, multicultural and multi-faith society, Malaysia is keenly aware that it has to carefully balance the exercise of certain rights and freedoms with its responsibility for maintaining peaceful and harmonious relations among its various communities. While today we generally have peace and harmony among Malaysia's various communities, that has not always been the case, since inter-ethnic relations, and intercommunal divisions on such issues as wages, income inequality and socioeconomic status, were acutely sharp and divisive in the years immediately following our independence.

In the light of our own experience, we would like to take this opportunity to underscore the importance of certain key values, principles and approaches that must be preserved and nurtured in pluralistic societies. They include, first, tolerance and inclusiveness among communities, which pluralist societies must foster and strengthen over time; secondly, an understanding of diversity as a source of strength and unity must also be fostered, through Government-led efforts, where appropriate; thirdly, applying the principle of moderation as a general approach to guiding and framing the parameters for inter-communal relations, cooperation and understanding; and fourthly, ensuring that certain rights and freedoms of minority communities, where appropriate, enjoy legal protection and sanction. It is equally important that promoting and protecting minority rights be seen to be balanced, especially when measured against the legitimate concerns of the majority.

Against the rising tide of violent extremists and their narrative, the need for broad-based cooperation aimed at fostering understanding and building bridges between communities, including through sustained interfaith dialogue, among other things, must be pursued in earnest. For its part, Malaysia stands ready to participate and contribute in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism, including by combating their destructive narrative and agenda.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Mr. Fabius, we are pleased to welcome you as President of the Security Council today. We are grateful to you for convening today's meeting on such an important and topical subject, which the Russian Federation considers particularly significant, as was also indicated in the speech on Christians in the Middle East given in Geneva on 2 March by Sergey Lavrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, at a side event during the current session of the Human Rights Council initiated by Russia, the Vatican and Lebanon on "Supporting the rights of Christians, particularly in the Middle East", with the resounding backing of 65 States.

For thousands of years the Middle East has been a crossroads of cultures and civilizations. It was the birthplace of three major monotheistic religions. Its historical traditions of peaceful coexistence between different beliefs and mutual learning and cultural enrichment go back for centuries. Unfortunately, the Middle East has also seen many bloody wars and devastating invasions and has been plunged into an abyss of obscurantism and senseless brutality more than once. Today, once again, a terrible drama is playing out before our eyes in the region. Gangs of radical extremists, led by a blind, inhumane, medieval ideology, are inflicting mass carnage on anyone who does not share their dogmas, blowing up schools, mosques and churches, evicting people from their homes, destroying thousand-year-old shrines and historical and cultural monuments and imprisoning religious leaders in dungeons. Their bloody cruelty and reason-defying obscurantism know no limits.

The preconditions enabling a slew of countries in the region to become hotbeds of terrorism — terrorism that hides behind the slogans of Islam but has nothing in common with that world religion — did not appear overnight. The spread of this evil phenomenon has been due in large part to the thoughtless actions of players from outside the region, both before and during the so-called Arab Spring, examples of which are not hard to find, since everyone is talking about them. The 2003 invasion of Iraq, among other ills, wiped

out its State institutions and essentially abandoned the country's religious and ethnic communities to their own resources, exposing deep contradictions between them that have taken horrifying and exaggerated forms. The situation became even worse in 2011, when the NATO bombing undertaken in violation of resolution 1973 (2011) not only destroyed the Al-Qadhafi regime but all the elements that had previously made Libya a unified State.

In Syria, some members of the international community, instead of helping the Syrians settle their internal crisis, began to rock the boat, showering money and arms on opponents of the country's legitimate President, Bashar Al-Assad, while simultaneously putting unprecedented military, political and economic pressure on his Government. As a result, the successors to Al-Qaida, having established a solid position in the Syrian war, proclaimed a caliphate and plied their trade of violence and genocide throughout the territories of Syria, Iraq and Libya, with cells in Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and a number of other countries. What was once a population of half a million Christians, Yazidis, Assyrians and Sabian Mandaeans in Iraq is now threatened with a total exodus. Representatives of Syria's minorities — Christians, Jews, Armenians, Assyrians and Turkomans — are also leaving in droves. The reverberations of the tragedy that has gripped the region, intensified by inter-confessional and inter-civilization contradictions, are being heard far beyond the region's borders in very different parts of the world.

From the very beginning of the so-called Arab Spring, Russia has supported settling the crisis situations in the region through evolutionary reforms and national dialogue without outside interference, based on building peace and harmony among all religious groups, including the various sects of Islam and Christianity. At the time, our calls for ensuring that the situation not be given up to the mercy of religious extremists went unheeded — or, rather, were heard selectively. In some places the extremists were held off, while in others they were supported, led by cynical political calculation, used as a battering ram to crush inconvenient regimes. The most evil forces felt that their time had come. The results have been the Egyptian Copts beheaded in Libya and Egypt, the Lebanese Shiites incinerated in a bus outside Damascus, the Zaidi Shiites bombed in mosques in Sana'a, the Iraqi Yazidis tortured in barbaric jails. The Alawites of Latakia and the Assyrians of Hasaka, as well as those Sunnis who oppose the caliphate's wars, are also targeted.

Russia firmly and consistently condemns all acts of violence against civilian populations, including those based on ethnic and religious grounds. We will continue our principled approach in the interests of achieving inter-confessional and inter-ethnic peace and reconciliation in Syria, Iraq and the other countries of the Middle East. And we will continue to advocate for both Christians and followers of other religions who are persecuted by terrorists.

We believe firmly that we can successfully combat the rise of religious extremism and the terrorist structures representing it in the region only through a global and comprehensive approach. The overall objective should be to unite international, regional and national efforts, which can be achieved only by rejecting policies of double standards and an obsession with extracting every possible short-term geopolitical benefit.

The Security Council has taken important steps with its adoption of a number of resolutions, including resolutions 2170 (2014) and 2199 (2015). But that is clearly not enough. We urge all responsible representatives of the international community to do everything possible to reverse the dangerous trend to ethnic and sectarian strife in the Middle East and to support the coexistence of different ethnic and religious communities, so deeply rooted in history, in this vital region of the world.

In order to solve the problem of violence against Christians and other minorities, the international community should unify its efforts aimed at combating terrorism on the basis of norms of international law, avoid double standards, including in counter-terrorism efforts, and cease to rely on radical forces or to train opposition forces, because they can easily be turned into extremists. It is also important to work together to restore the political process for a settlement in Syria by encouraging all Syrian parties to return to dialogue and unity to fight terrorism.

Our shared task is to help the countries in the region to peacefully overcome crises, to bring an end to old and new conflicts and to renew healthy pluralistic societies and strong political systems by ensuring human rights and basic freedoms for everyone. It is clear that only through a comprehensive and responsible approach in the areas of policy and security can we solve the

problems that States of the Middle East are facing, and thereby protect the rights of all minorities in the region.

Mr. Cherif (Chad) (*spoke in French*): I would like first of all to commend the initiative of the French delegation to organize today's open Security Council debate at the ministerial level on the protection of minority victims of attacks and abuses on ethnic or religious grounds in the Middle East. I welcome His Excellency Mr. Laurent Fabius, French Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development, as well as all the ministers present in the Chamber.

I also thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon; Prince Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; His Beatitude Louis Raphaël I Sako, Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans; and Mrs. Vian Dakhil, member of the Iraqi Parliament, for their briefings.

Today's debate is timely, especially as it comes at a particularly critical moment for the Middle East, which is going through a deep political and security crisis that has ushered in the emergence and expansion of extremely violent terrorist groups. These groups commit crimes of unheard of atrociousness, in particular in Iraq and Syria, in violation of human dignity and international law.

Individuals and groups belonging to national, ethnic or religious minorities are the favoured targets of such terrorist movements as Daesh and its affiliates, which engage in systematic and widespread persecution of Christians, Kurds, Yazidis, Shabaks, Turkmens and, in certain regions, Sunnis, Shiites and other ethnic and religious minorities. That persecution consists of murders, abductions, torture, forced displacement and all other forms of atrocity. As evidenced by the moving testimony of Mrs. Dakhil, women and children are subjected to physical and sexual violence as part of their daily lives, and some are deliberately executed. The destruction of works including cultural assets shows the degree of terrorist groups' animus towards minorities. However, Christians and other minorities have lived for millennia in the region and are an integral part of the social fabric. By targeting these groups, Daesh has destroyed the social fabric and peaceful coexistence that have existed among the different communities in the Middle East for millennia.

The issue of minorities is as ancient as their existence across countries and regions of the world. The Middle East has its own share of minorities who, with all their religious ethnic, social diversity and their own history and cultural values, have contributed to the influence of this part of the world.

Political transitions under way in the Arab world that should be bringing about social cohesion have instead caused confusion, from which, unfortunately, terrorist groups have been able to benefit. Already in a precarious situation, minorities persecuted by terrorist groups doubly suffer the horrors of war. Daesh's recent persecution of Christian, Shiite and Kurdish minorities in Iraq and the barbaric executions of Egyptian Copts in Libya are not only a source of concern for the future of those minorities, but also serve to point to the fact that substantial efforts at international and regional levels are needed for their protection.

Faced with such a grave situation, we need to guarantee these minorities our support and protection. In that regard, we believe that the actions that the United Nations and the international community could undertake should take the following elements into account: stepping up international and regional cooperation in the fight against terrorism, taking into account the recent decisions taken at the Washington, D.C., summit on 19 February and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council on terrorism and violent extremism; the regular inclusion of the issue of the protection of minorities in the agenda of the Security Council's deliberations in order to find the ways and means to increase protection while respecting the territorial integrity, national unity and independence of States; broadening the scope of judicial cooperation among States, especially those in the Middle East region, to ensure that cross-border criminals do not evade justice; and helping to establish democracy and the rule of law, which are a vehicle for human rights and the only guarantor of true peace. On the humanitarian front, we should provide massive assistance to affected communities in conflict zones in the Middle East and help them resettle in their homelands.

We know that the emergence and rapid growth of Daesh in Iraq, Syria and elsewhere are the consequences of years of exclusion and marginalization of a significant portion of the population that has been left behind in political, economic and social processes and which has suffered from all forms of frustration, thereby reinforcing the need for identity politics or the rejection of the other, which the terrorists have be able to exploit. Under these circumstances, it is not just military solutions to the various conflicts that

could prevail in the Middle East; we need to encourage countries in crisis to engage in peaceful and inclusive political processes leading to the establishment of a State in which citizenship is the only criterion of belonging to the nation and where all the components of society can enjoy their right to live in their country in peace, freedom, equality and dignity. From this perspective, we believe that to ensure the protection of minorities, education and outreach are the best means for breaking down barriers between communities and dispelling stereotypes from which antagonisms are built in the Middle East as elsewhere.

Ms. Sison (United States of America): I would like to begin by thanking Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, His Beatitude Louis Raphaël I Sako, Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans, and Mrs. Vian Dakhil, member of the Iraqi Parliament, for sharing their valuable insights with us today.

Promoting religious freedom is a priority for President Obama, and it remains a core value that influences United States diplomatic engagement worldwide. In recent days and months, the brutal persecution of religious minorities has been metastasizing at an alarming rate. We thank you, Mr. President, for France's presiding over this meeting on such an important issue. We also note with great interest the Secretary-General's announcement of a United Nations action plan and intention to create an advisory panel on the matter.

We have all heard today, and some in this Chamber have witnessed with their own eyes, the horrific atrocities commited by non-State actors against targeted religious groups in the Middle East. We have seen how Governments have been unable or unwilling to protect members of those groups or grant them the benefits and protections accorded to other citizens. Without that, those marginalized communities face an existential threat. Solely because of the faith they practice, Shia Muslims, Christians, Yazidis, Jews, Ismailis, Druze and others have been forcibly converted, killed or evicted from the places where their ancestors have lived for hundreds and, in some cases, thousands of years. Some face abduction, and others have been forced into sexual slavery. My Government has repeatedly condemned the targeting of civilians of any religious affiliation for any kind of violence, and likewise has strongly condemned the destruction of religious sites and property. Let me be clear that there must be accountability for the individuals responsible for these terrible acts.

The threat of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, also known as ISIL or Daesh, transcends all cultures, religions and borders. Vulnerable communities across Egypt, Iraq and Syria are in danger of ISIL's abuses. We condemn the despicable and cowardly murder of 21 Egyptian Copts by ISIL last month in Libya. ISIL's atrocities are not solely targeted against the region's religious minorities, however. The mass executions of over 700 Sunni Arabs from the Al-Sheitat tribe in eastern Syria last August, over 600 members of the Abu Nour tribe in western Iraq in October, and at least 1,000 detained Shia Iraqi Air Force cadets at Camp Speicher in June attest clearly to this fact.

With more than 60 coalition patrtners, many of which are represented in the Chamber today, we are working to degrade and ultimately defeat the common threat ISIL poses to the world. We are providing security assistance to combat ISIL, and working to disrupt the flow of foreign fighters and ISIL's financial resources. But I also want to specifically note that protecting religious minorities in the face of the threat that ISIL poses, notably in Iraq and Syria, is and will remain one of the key priorities in our strategy to counter ISIL.

The actions we took on Mount Sinjar in Iraq last summer exemplify that commitment. Tens of thousands of Yazidis — men, women and children — fled ISIL's advances on their villages around Mount Sinjar. Others were trapped on the mountain with no food, water or escape route in the scorching August heat. In light of those dire circumstances, President Obama decided to take targeted military action and provide critical assistance, at the request of the Iraqi Government, to avert further atrocities. Since that time, we have remained keenly attentive to the ongoing threats against Yazidis, including the fate of the 4,000-5,000 women and girls taken captive by ISIL — a situation described so very powerfully by the honourable member of the Iraqi Parliament, Mrs. Vian Dakhil. We remain in close touch with representatives of the Yazidi community.

The persecution of religious minorities in the Middle East, however, extends beyond these heinous acts carried out by ISIL. In Syria, the Al-Assad regime's brutal, heavy-handed tactics in violently suppressing a peaceful protest movement have fueled the growth of ISIL and other extremist groups. As throughout the Middle East, the Christian community's presence in

Syria has dropped precipitously. After four years of civil war, hundreds of thousands of Christians have fled the country to escape the ongoing violence perpetrated by the Al-Assad regime and extremist groups alike.

In the city of Homs, for example, the number of Christians has dwindled to as few as 1,000, down from nearly 160,000 before the war began, after the city was completely emptied of all but a few residents following a merciless siege by the Al-Assad regime that prevented food, water and medicine from entering the city for almost two long years. Al-Assad's regime has indiscriminately bombed residential areas across the country and killed thousands and thousands of Syrians of all backgrounds. It has bombed dozens of churches, mosques and an ancient Syrian Jewish synagogue, highlighting the regime's cynical efforts to violently suppress its opponents at any cost.

We cannot turn to the dangers that religious minorities now face from the Al-Assad regime and extremist groups such as ISIL without first recognizing the role that the systematized marginalization of religious minorities vis-à-vis State institutions, legal structures or Government practices has played in depriving citizens of their civic rights, due solely to their religious identity. Blasphemy laws, registration laws, societal discrimination and plain outright violence have served to marginalize such groups, making them unwelcome in their own communities. For instance, Muslims who practice Sufism have faced persecution from some Governments in the region. The Baha'i are another example of a minority group that has long suffered at the hands of virtually Government in the region, either from onerous registration laws or active and violent Government persecution. All that remains of the once vibrant and extensive Jewish population in the region is a handful of small, isolated communities.

The United States continues to seek every opportunity to assist those suffering under the threat of extremist groups, including ISIL. The United States remains the single largest donor to the humanitarian response for Syria, contributing over $3.1 billion since the civil war began. That assistance is being provided to all individuals on the basis of need, regardless of religious identity or political affiliation, and to meet the needs of all Syrians, including religious minorities. The United States Government also continues to be a primary donor to displaced Iraqis, contributing over $219 million since 2014. We also expect to make another major contribution to the Syrian humanitarian crisis at the upcoming pledging conference later this month in Kuwait.

Of course, while religious differences can be exploited to divide societies, religioun can also be a powerful motivator for bringing people together. We saw how religion can bind and help heal a community when ISIL brutally used sexual violence against Yazidi women and girls as a tactic of war, attempting to exploit the destructive power of the stigma attached to rape. These attempts failed, however, when a prominent religious leader of the Yazidi community, Baba Sheikh, called on all Yazidis to welcome these girls back, even accepting into his home two girls who had escaped ISIL.

We believe that our nations are strongest when we uphold the the equality of our people. We in every country around the world must therefore be relentless in turning the tides against any effort to sow hatred along sectarian or religious lines, or deprive anyone of equal respect, dignity or rights based on the beliefs they hold. Many of us are already committed to diversity and respect for freedom of belief and conscience for all women and men, but all of us must recommit by speaking out on behalf of the religious minorities that are fighting for their rights, their lives and their humanity today.

Mr. McLay (New Zealand): I thank France for holding this very important debate, which, as the High Commissioner reminded us, is about tolerance versus maniacal ideology — a stark choice indeed.

I also thank the two briefers, His Beatitude Patriarch Sako and Mrs. Dakhil, for what they told us through their briefings. While we debate issues in a windowless room, far from events — and there is a lot of symbolism in that — they have breathed real life into our consideration of ethnic and religious attacks and abuses. And I thank them for that.

The oppression and persecution of religious and ethnic minorities and religious eradication is, as Minister Fabius reminded us, deplorable, wherever and whenever, and at whosoever's hand it occurs. That is especially apparent now, with terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, posing a direct, complex threat to international peace and security. Such groups show no respect for national borders, crossing them at will and drawing support from networks extending to the farthest ends of the earth, my own country included. They revel in publicizing their

atrocities and inciting fear. They want us to respond with anger and outrage, and we do just that. It is crucial that the international community acknowledge the threat that these groups pose and that we promote the cause of inclusive, multicultural, multi-religious societies. We therefore see this debate as an important step in galvanizing global momentum towards that end, and in addressing the causes of the conflicts on which those groups thrive.

New Zealand is appalled at the upsurge in violence and persecution of ethnic and religious minorities in many parts of the world. This issue is not unique to the Middle East or to any single religion. Violent extremist groups find traction in times of major societal stress, and diverse, multicultural societies worldwide are affected. And they are diminished as a result. But we are particularly concerned at the brutal and ongoing atrocities in the Middle East.

As the High Commissioner told us, it is apparent that recent atrocities perpetrated by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant amounted to genocide against Iraq's Yazidi community. The richness and diversity of the Middle East has been a major contributor to global civilization, and that richness and diversity must be preserved. Some of the region's ethnic and religious communities have traditions that go back millennia. And just as we celebrate those traditions, it is equally important that we acknowledge that most Middle Eastern countries have a long history of tolerance and of managing ethnic and religious diversity.

The current turmoil is bringing communities that have coexisted peacefully for centuries into brutal conflict, and it threatens irrevocable damage to the region's rich social tapestry. Extremist groups are exploiting instability in order to establish themselves and to spread their brutal sectarian agenda, often displaying considerable skills in the use of social media. The Internet, which was initially largely a product of open, liberal societies, has been turned back on those same societies — the British Under Secretary spoke earlier of the hijacking of the Internet. So, what should be the response from affected States and from the international community? How should we respond?

The immediate priority must be to restore security in situations where minorities are particularly vulnerable. That requires stable and inclusive political solutions, and it means providing support to end the conflicts and instability on which extremist groups nurture their ideologies. But security-based approaches will not succeed alone. Affected communities need to find new, post-conflict ways to manage their diversity. Factors such as economic, social and sectarian discrimination, inequality, marginalization, insecurity, and a lack of inclusive and impartial governance must all be addressed. They are the causes: they must be addressed. That requires strong political will and sustained commitment at all levels of Government, as well as inclusive post-conflict initiatives that do not entrench existing divisions.

One of the real tests of a society is the extent to which it accommodates minorities, so it is regrettable that in these situations minority voices are all-too-often sidelined, causing ever more discontent and conflict. We need to work with communities. Violent extremism often has its roots at the community level, and must therefore be defeated at that same community level. Religious, community and educational leaders all play a central role in promoting peace, tolerance and mutual respect. We therefore urge the United Nations and individual Member States to continue promoting anti-radicalization and to continue countering violent extremism by involving those leaders in a genuinely meaningful manner. It is they who can provide the solutions.

New Zealand supports projects in our region that enhance community resilience, such as community policing, which brings together community members and police to apply policing in ethnically diverse environments. We join those who have endorsed the Secretary-General's action plan, and we call for its swift implementation.

The Security Council has an important role to play in addressing the persecution and oppression of religious and ethnic minorities by strengthening community resilience and fostering inclusive governance and cross-cultural dialogue. As with so much of the Council's agenda, New Zealand stands ready to contribute to that dialogue, and in so doing, to take up Mr. Fabius's dual challenge to show solidarity with the persecuted and to show a determination to fight the perpetrators of these dreadful crimes.

Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank you, Sir, for having convened this open debate. I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of France, Mr. Laurent Fabius, for his presence here in the Security Council.

I also express our gratitude for the remarks by the Secretary-General and the briefing by Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, High Commissioner for Human Rights. We also appreciate and deeply value the testimony given by Louis Rafaël I Sako, Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans, and representative of the Iraqi Parliament, Mrs. Vian Dakhil.

Venezuela unequivocally condemns all acts of intolerance, intimidation, aggression and violence committed against any religious or ethnic community by extremist organizations, in particular acts committed by terrorist groups, which have recently proliferated in the Middle East. We condemn how human beings have been degraded, with the revival of medieval practices that we believed long-buried, including acts of murder, slavery, kidnapping, torture, and human trafficking that are motivated by religious belief or ethnicity. We also condemn the destruction of the cultural, historical and religious heritage of humankind in the Middle East region at the hands of these extremist groups.

Venezuela, based on its ongoing commitment to international peace and security, reiterates its firm and unequivocal condemnation of violence and terrorism, whatever their motivations, whoever the perpetrators and wherever committed. We wonder how it can be possible that the region that was the cradle of civilizations, where diverse ethnic and religious groups have coexisted for millennia, is being torn apart by the barbaric terrorism that we are denouncing today. We believe that the prolonged war in the region, along with military interventions in Iraq, Libya and Syria as well as assistance to armed groups seeking to destabilize or overthrow Governments, has led to tragic consequences, exacerbating inter-religious and ethnic hatred and violence as State institutions have crumbled or collapsed.

Prolonged war and intervention have also jeopardized the unity, territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence of the countries of the Middle East, unleashing a spiral of violence against communities based on their social, political, religious or ethnic identity. The destruction of the social fabric and the dismantling of State capacities and institutions are fertile ground for terrorist extremism. We denounce the current attemptto to apply the same formula in Syria as was done in Iraq and Libya. The training, supply and support of armed extremist groups, as well as action against States based on politically motivated arguments of questionable credibility have generated economic, political and social chaos, paving the way for the rise of extremist organizations such as those that have generated the present situation.

How is it possible for terrorist groups to act with such military might? We cannot but notice that such organizations have continued to proliferate and have recently grown more powerful. Who is financing them? Who is providing the military arsenal that enables them to commit such atrocities agaisnt religious or ethnic minorities? We call on the Security Council to insist on full compliance with the resolutions it has adopted within the framework of Chapter VII of the Charter, which prohibit funding and support for such criminal groups. It is essential that the perpetrators of such crimes and those who provide them with financial and material support be brought to justice.

The international community must take decisive action against terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaida, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and the Al-Nusra Front, among others. However, a military vision alone cannot put a stop to those terrorist groups. In order to guarantee peace and security, States and the international community as a whole must contribute in an organic and comprehensive way to building egalitarian societies that promote inclusive development, eradicate poverty and universalize systems of social security and protection that ensure the full enjoyment of the social, economic, cultural, environmental, political and civil rights of all people, including minorities.

It is vital to explore the structural conditions that trigger the appearance and proliferation of terrorist entities. The international response to the phenomenon demands an honest appraisal of States' responsibility to preserve the security and integrity of society as a whole. The fight to combat terrorism must be conducted within the framework of international law, human rights, and international humanitarian law. But the fight against terrorism must not be used as an excuse to violate the principles and purposes of the Charter. Political solutions to conflict should prevail over military ones.

Venezuela is a melting pot of cultures, races and religions. As a land free of armed conflict, we have created a society whose common goals are based on eradicating poverty and promoting inclusive development to ensure for all its citizens a life with dignity. Our country views with pain and indignation the suffering of the victims and expresses its solidarity with the countries of the Middle East, with which we

have strong historical and cultural ties. From our seat on the Council we will do everything possible to resolve this scourge that threatens humanity itself.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China appreciates the French initiative to convene today's open debate on the protection of Middle East minorities and welcomes Foreign Minister Fabius to New York to preside over the meeting. I would like to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein for their briefings. My thanks also go to Patriarch Sako and Iraqi parliamentarian Dakhil for their statements.

Over the recent period, terrorism and violent extremism in the Middle East have been rampant. Massive human rights violations, in particular violations against ethnic and religious minorities, have been frequent, leading to huge casualties and the destruction of some significant cultural sites, which has drawn great concern from the international community. China supports the measures that the international community has taken in that regard.

First, the utmost effort should be made to promote peace and stability in the Middle East. Turbulence breeds terrorism and extremism. As long as there is no peace in the world, terrorists and extremist force will take advantage of the situation. History and reality have repeatedly proven that the resort to force or violence against violence will not bring about peace. Political dialogue and national reconciliation are the only solution. China hopes that the parties concerned in the Middle East will base their actions on the well-being of their people, iron out their differences and settle their disputes. The international community, on the basis of respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the countries concerned, should provide effective assistance and stabilize the situation in the Middle East as soon as possible.

Secondly, concerted efforts should be made to combat terrorism and extremism. Terrorism is the common enemy of mankind. Combating terrorism requires the solidarity, synergy and coordination of the international community. China is firmly opposed to all forms of terrorism and actively supports international counter-terrorism cooperation. There should be no double standard in counter-terrorism. Furthermore, there should be no linkage posited between terrorism and specific ethnic or religious communities.

In a context in which the forces of international terrorism keep changing their tactics and use the Internet and other new media to conduct terrorist activities, the international community should strengthen cooperation and take effective measures to firmly combat terrorist organizations that are using the Internet to carry out recruitment, incitement, planning and funding. The international community should pay close attention to the ripple effect caused by terrorists. While strengthening efforts to combat terrorism and extremist in the Middle East, measures must be taken to effectively prevent them from spreading to other regions or areas.

Thirdly, it is vital to eradicate ideologies supporting terrorism and extremism and advocate for dialogue among civilizations. The Middle East has a long history and a wide range of ethnic communities and is one of the regions with the greatest diversity of human civilizations. When it comes to civilizations, one cannot speak of superiority or inferiority. Inclusiveness brings about coexistence; exclusiveness brings about hatred. The international community, including the relevant United Nations agencies working in the Middle East, should promote respect, openness and inclusiveness, which embody the spirit of dialogue among civilizations. It should also advocate for exchanges and mutual learning and should work to create a sound social atmosphere for people with different ethnic, cultural or religious backgroundsso that they can coexist in equality and harmony and no opening is left for terrorism and extremism.

Fourthly, it is important to speed up development and eradicate the breeding ground for terrorism, which is poverty and underdevelopment. They are the major root causes for conflicts and terrorism. The international community, and the United Nations in particular, should strengthen their efforts on the international development agenda, actively assist the Middle Eastern countries in developing their economies, creating job opportunities, eradicating poverty, improving people's livelihoods, enhancing youth education and women's empowerment, improving governance and building capacity for self-development, so that people can enjoy peace and prosperity, thus removing the breeding ground for terrorism.

Protecting the people of the Middle East from terrorism and extremism is the common responsibility of the international community and requires greater efforts, inputs and measures from all States. China

is ready to join hands with the parties concerned and make constant efforts to remove the real threat facing the Middle East, in particular their minorities, so as to create a sound and peaceful environment for them.

Ms. Murmokaitė (Lithuania) (*spoke in French*): My delegation would like to thank the French presidency for having convened this important meeting. Without a doubt, the force of humanity lies in its diversity. But entire communities, which have existed in the Middle East for thousands of years, are at risk of disappearing owing to fanatic and radical attacks. Without the richness of religious, ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity, the Middle East would no longer be itself. We are not only talking about the loss of an age-old heritage, but also structural transformation into a region where extremism no longer finds any obstacles to its spread.

The situation in Iraq and Syria no longer constitutes merely an armed conflict or a conflict of values, but a global human, economic and cultural tragedy. The attacks in Tunisia and Yemen last week, which followed several others, including those that struck France in January, have confirmed the urgency of the common battle against radical extremism in all its manifestations.

The Daesh fanatics are not like other terrorists. They control a vast territory and present themselves as an illegal and criminal version of a State. They aspire to create a space for themselves, one of a fanatic extremism that is blind and deadly, a space where those who do not share their vision — whether Yazidis, Shabaks, Kurds, Christians, or even Muslims who have a different concept of their faith — are left only with the alternatives of flight, forced conversion, enslavement for women and girls, forced conscription for children, or, in the end, massacre.

The report that the Human Rights Council has just published does not falter in addressing Daesh crimes against humanity and their genocide with reference to the Yazidis. The situation of other minorities in the region is equally tragic. In particular, the Christians, an integral part of the historical regional diversity, a people of the Book, are disappearing in the areas controlled by Daesh.

The terrorist scourge of Daesh knows no borders. From Syria and Iraq, it is moving to Libya; it carries out attacks in Mali, Yemen, Tunisia and elsewhere. It threatens to destabilize the entire Sahel region. It is creating dangerous ties with radical movements in Nigeria and Somalia. It is recruiting thousands of foreign fighters, which is further fuelling the conflict. These fighters come from other countries, and given the fact that they are not local, they are often the perpetrators of the most brutal and inhuman crimes against local populations, including minorities.

In spite of all that Daesh's propaganda claims, we the international community must remain very clear and unequivocal with regard to one fact — Daesh is simply a murderous and perverse organization. We must stop these barbaric extremists by taking all necessary measures against them. We must coordinate our efforts in order to destroy the fabric of their deceitful propaganda. We must rip off their religious mask to reveal their true criminal, brutal and depraved face.

Daesh is a modern terrorist organization. It is sophisticated in its use of media technologies and social networks. While terrorism is becoming more modern, the international community's response must also evolve. The new dimension of the threat requires continued work on intelligence and analysis to deal with the propaganda, recruitment and misinformation created by these Internet terrorists. Additional efforts are required to disseminate persuasive messages and counter-arguments — and to hunt down, neutralize and punish those responsible for brutal and extreme cruelty.

We insist that Security Council resolutions be fully implemented. Daesh and other terrorist groups that are overrunning the region should no longer be allowed to find sanctuary there. We must dismantle their financing, recruiting and weaponization networks. Additionally, we must attack the marriage of convenience between terrorism and cross-border organized crime. That massive and multifaceted task requires coherence, coordination and complementarity of action on the part of the entire United Nations common system. In particular, we must overcome the silo mentality that still persists in the work of the various entities of the system.

We know very well that at the heart of the fight against terrorism lies respect for human rights, good governance, legality, trust on the part of populations in their Governments as being truly capable of ensuring them a dignified future based on inclusion, integration and equality among all of the elements of society — true economic and social cohesion. We must coherently and consistently promote the ideas of tolerance, rewarding diversity and open and inclusive dialogue among religions, cultures and civilizations. It is also important

to take into account good practices already existing in this area.

We must win the hearts and minds of the local population so as to overcome existing divisions, prejudices and marginalization. We bear in mind that in Iraq considerable efforts have been required to achieve national reconciliation and a fair and inclusive policy. In that respect, we fully support the necessary efforts of the Iraqi Government, while recognizing that much remains to be done. Unfortunately, the Syrian regime persists on its path of death and destruction, while facilitating the expansion of forms of terrorism that are most atrocious and barbaric, including those of Daesh.

Before I conclude, please allow me to underscore another key point, namely, justice. It is imperative that those responsible for terrorist atrocities, war crimes and serious violations of human rights, including those against minorities, be properly identified and punished by tribunals, including the International Court. The fight against impunity is a prerequisite in ensuring that the historical, cultural and religious diversity of the Middle East are preserved and protected.

Mr. Sarki (Nigeria): Allow me to commend the presidency for the exemplary leadership that it has given to the Security Council during the course of this meeting and to welcome His Excellency the Foreign Minister personally to this meeting. Allow me to also welcome the Foreign Ministers of Angola and Spain, the Under Secretary of State from the United Kingdom, the Director General from Chile, Patriarch Sako, and Mrs. Dakhil from Iraq. We also welcome the participation of the Secretary-General and commend him for his leadership.

For as long as we can recall, this is the first time that a religious matter has been debated in the Security Council in this manner, outside the framework of an Arria formula meeting. We welcome this initiative of the delegation of France. Based on the realization that the deteriorating situation in the Middle East poses a grave threat to many communities in the region, we welcome the participation of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in this debate. We call upon his Office and the Human Rights Commission to intensify their efforts to offer protection to all endangered minorities everywhere in the world. We also hope that the scope of this debate will be extended in the future to cover the situation of all minorities everywhere, including racial minorities, such as Africans, people of African descent and indigenous peoples. The protection of religious and ethnic minorities must extend beyond the Middle East and encompass all other parts of the world.

Turning to the Middle East, if history is to be an accurate guide, we recall that during the centuries of Ottoman rule in the region a policy of tolerance and harmony was established by means of the *millet* system. To a large extent, the *millet* system accorded ethnic and religious minorities the freedom to practice their religions and to live in freedom and relative security. The harmonious system lasted until the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire.

If we are to do justice to this subject, we must look at the root causes of the phenomenon in the region. The general instability engendered in the region by foreign occupation, civil wars fuelled by external interference, forceful changes of Government, the delegitimization of national leaders, the imposition of sanctions and other punitive measures, the free flow of dangerous and sophisticated armaments to rebels and terrorists, the financing of anti-Government forces, prolonged occupation and injustices meted out to people and several other factors have contributed to the sorry state of affairs that we are witnessing in the Middle East today.

The proliferation of small and light weapons and deadly ordnances of war must also be linked to the atrocities that are being committed by terrorists like the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) and other illegal armed groups in the Middle East. The effective imposition of sanctions on proliferators of weapons of mass destruction must be expeditiously considered by the Council. The Arms Trade Treaty, which has come into force, must also be universally ratified and implemented to check the further spread of this scourge. The observance of existing international human rights and international humanitarian law is a basic prerequisite for the maintenance of international peace and security and the protection of all minorities in our regions. Human rights, treaty bodies and relevant conventions of the United Nations have a role to play in that regard. We also believe that the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action offer a platform for combating discrimination, intolerance and xenophobia.

The Security Council's relevant resolutions are equally critical to addressing this problem. We therefore welcome the Secretary-General's announced initiative to address the issue of violent extremism. We also

thank France for its leadership and commend Spain for the proposals that it has put forward. Nigeria hopes to contribute further to this initiative. We have put in place a soft approach to countering violent extremism in our country that we can share with other interested parties. It is a multidimensional and multifaceted framework that recognizes that counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism must not be limited to military action alone, but should also consist of other initiatives that offer incentives to win young people away from the lure of terrorism and extremist ideology.

Nigeria has always espoused tolerance, mutual respect and understanding as the glue that binds together multiethnic, multi-religious and multicultural societies. Where this is lacking, problems are bound to occur. Ethnic and religious minorities form part of the social fabric of the Middle East. They belong to the region and have lived there for millenia. They have the right to continue to live in their communities without let or hindrance, in peace, safety and dignity. The right to maintain their religious identities and ways of life is inalienable.

The atrocities committed by ISIS are unprecedented. It has killed and enslaved innocent people indiscriminately, often with minorities being deliberately targeted. It has destroyed valued religious and cultural structures and symbols. It has caused massive destruction of social fabrics and displaced large numbers of people, including ethnic and religious minorities, from their homes, thereby triggering avoidable humanitarian disasters.

The atrocities of ISIS underscore the urgent need for the international community to scale up the fight against terrorism, violent extremism and other forms of intolerance and xenophobia. A strong and clear message needs to be sent to all terrorist organizations acting with utter impunity and callous disregard for life and property. The international community, led by the Council, must also show resolve in fighting the forces of unscrupulous violence and destabilization, and support all affected populations through the immediate delivery of humanitarian and other forms of assistance.

The 1999 Constitution of Nigeria recognizes and accommodates our diversity as a nation along ethnic and religious lines. The Constitution provides an inclusive framework in which every citizen is guaranteed the enjoyment of full freedom and liberty as a right. Nigeria stands shoulder to shoulder with your country, Mr. President, and with the rest of the international community in the fight against terrorism, violent extremism and other forms of negative and destabilizing influences.

The President (*spoke in French*): I would ask speakers to limit the length of their statements to four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly rquested to circulate the text in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Emigrants of Lebanon.

Mr. Bassil (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I wish to thank France, which has always worked to protect minorities. We extend our heartfelt thanks for the initiatives and ideas that have been proposed today. We warmly greet Patriarch Sako and our sister Mrs. Vian Dakhil, who is the model of the courageous activist Arab woman.

I have come to this meeting today after cutting short my participation in the meeting of the League of Arab States. I was the only one among all the Ministers who left that meeting in order to be here with my colleagues in the Security Council to find ways to end the cultural genocide that is occurring in our region. Once this meeting has been adjourned, I will immediately go back to my home region, where I will actively seeking to ensure that the League remains a league of civilizations more than one united by virtue of language. No matter how much the international and Arab communities disappoint us, we will continue to work and our people will continue the struggle to save to the soul of Lebanon and the Middle East and our culture from danger. We are the children of a nation that has witnessed the greatest travails of history. We have been resilient, depending not on material power, but only on our culture.

We are are descendants of the Phoenician civilization that invented the alphabet and exported it around the world through our commercial ports. We are of an eastern identity that has moulded the heavenly religions in one land and in one human being. We are the descendants of a Lebanese formula unique in terms of power-sharing in governance between Christians and Muslims. We are the descendants of a great nation that is a martyr in its own land, a people that has sent out a message of hope when it was able to withstand

and showed resilience on its own land, a people that has carried along with it the message of humanity when it was forcibly displaced from its land.

We come here from the land of divine messages and from the home of the message, Lebanon. It is the message of tolerance, coexistence and the safeguard of others. It is a message of humanity in the face of Daesh, the inhuman. We are the descendants of the messengers and prophets. We come from the wombs that brought forth Moses, Jesus and Mohammed. We are the grandchildren of those who were born and grew up in the Middle East, emigrated to and integrated and lived in Lebanon and coexisted with the East and the West. That is why we have been persecuted. Our only guilt is that, by the coefficient of coincidence, we were born into confessional communities. We believed that the United Nations was created to protect people like us, but the rise of Daesh represents a major setback for the global security regime.

The apostolic guidance directed us not to ask for any privileges and we do not seek any. Nevertheless, we want to ask: What has happened to the characteristics of our region? What has become of the Mesopotamian country of Iraq? What has become of Syria, the country of the two caliphates? What has become of Lebanon, the country of two civilizations? One cannot but wonder why our principles have been sacrificed on the altar of alien interests, and we now find ourselves being killed by Daesh and Israel, in the full glare of the world, which only records events and reports. We therefore wonder whether this twofold attack will continue to fuel tensions in the world. We also wonder about what remains of international law, international justice and the Security Council, while we no longer have the rule of law, justice or security in our region.

Speaking of minorities, one might ask: What remains of the minorities dignity if they live at the mercy of the majority's ideolog? If their numbers are decreasing, this will lead to their culture isolation. And what if their existence has become the shortest way to their disappearance? What remains of a minority if it has declined from 2 million to 300,000 in Iraq and in Turkey from 15 per cent to 1 per cent? In Bethlehem, the minority has declined from 85 to 12 per cent, and in Jerusalem from 52 to 2 per cent. Seven hundred thousand Christians and Yazidis were forcibly displaced from Mosul in one fell swoop and two bishops were kidnapped, without provoking any response. What will remain of the dignity of minorities if Assyrians are forcibly displaced as a result of this silence, and if the sculpture of Sargon of Akkadi, in Mosul, is destroyed? Moreover, what use is it if the authority of the Lebanese presidency has been transmuted and the candidates are scorned to a degree that they become accessible only to people whose political conscience is not free? Will any be minority spared if a State is allowed to be created in the name of Islam, while it is a radical and distorted interpretation of Islam?

In the light of all this, is it not worthwhile to operationalize the military option, and something more than mere air strikes, such as support for those armies, including our heroic Lebanese army, that are fighting and dying on the ground? Is it not worthy to operationalize the mechanism of international justice, something more than mere a statement, and to truly support Lebanon's endeavours at the International Criminal Court? Is that not worth something more than a meeting of the Security Council? In this respect, we thank France, whose level of representation reflects the international concern for safeguarding minorities and maintaining the dialogue among civilizations.

We are not here to defend groups or religions; we are here to defend principles and ways of life. Christianity is a culture of life and a set of human values that belong to all persons. Do we believe that Christianity can survive throughout the world in the absence of Christians on the land of Christ? Can a river continue to flow if its sources dry up? Can Islam continue if it is distorted in our region, demonized in the West and is hastily being massacred in the four corners of the world? Do we believe that Judaism, if it adopts an insular entity that is closed off to others, can defend against evil by itself? Do we believe that freedom means only accepting those who mock Mary and Jesus and publish cartoons depicting Mohammad being ravished, while anyone who uses anti-Semitic slurs is prosecuted?

Do we believe that the notion of integrity is limited to a mere simulacrum of the Middle Easterners in the West and the return of Muslims to the Middle East? Is it not that the very origin of the violence among civilizations lies along the two civilization on the shores of the Mediterranean? The value of Middle Easterners is resides in their remaining in the Middle East, thereby preserving its plurality and diversity. Additionally, that would prevent the various confessions from being transformed into isolated, homogenous sects, losing their original identities and rejecting their humane message, and stop them from

fighting among themselves and clashing collectively with the West. Such Middle Easterners would not be a demographic burden to the West. If all the embassies, interior ministries and airports welcomed the people of the Middle East, that would protect their them nor their receivers. Only resistance on their own territory will preserve our common civilization and community.

We have come here today to ask for more than the issuing a mere statement; we ask the presidency to prepare an international draft resolution that would truly protect the minorities of the Middle East and lay down geographic and moral red lines. Its implementation mechanism must include all States, while deterring all problematic groups. We ask for more than an end to the encouragement of the constituent communities of Armenians, Kurds, Turkomans, Circassians, Syriacs, Assyrians, Yazidis, Shabaks, Sabians and Druzes to emigrate. We even demand the return of all of those who were forced to flee from their homes at the hands of all the extremists since the nineteenth century.

Furthermore, we demand more than contributions to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and more than a trust fund for construction projects. We demand that an international fund be established by the United Nations for the reconstruction of the civilizations that have been destroyed, the return of peoples who have been forcibly displaced, and the restoration of cultural heritage damaged in the laboratory of realpolitik. Leaving home is like cutting off one's roots. Emigration is isolation from one's original roots, and we are the roots, the trunk and the link to our region. We are not ready to be separated from ourselves.

Israel has been the legitimate father of Daesh for decades and the one who has instigated war among us, the builders of civilization and advocates of peace. We need the Council's help in safeguarding our civilization, our culture and our identity, and in moving beyond the focus on our oil and resources. Our friendship, love, affection, goodness and peace must be won. Our presence in our own land is an act of faith. We are the children of faith, yet the Satan Daesh will not defeat us.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Integration of Austria.

Mr. Kurz (Austria): First of all, I would like to thank you, Sir, for convening this very important debate. At the moment, we are witnessing a dramatic rise in extremism in the name of religion. Tensions among different religious communities within our societies are increasing. A brief look at Facebook shows that especially young people seem to be the target of radicalization. That is a dangerous development and shows that one of the biggest challenges for my generation is to safeguard the cohesion of our societies.

The situation is particularly dramatic in the Middle East and North Africa — regions that are suffering from the terror of Daesh. The terrorists there are enslaving children, raping women and beheading men. In particular, minorities such as the Yazidis and the Christians are suffering. More than 50 per cent of the Christians in Iraq have disappeared over the past 10 years. Christians are already the most persecuted religious group worldwide, with 100 million suffering from persecution. In that context, we fully support the action plan proposed by the French presidency in that regard. We also have to call the shocking acts committed by Daesh by their names. They are war crimes, crimes against humanity, and even genocide. We must not let them go unpunished. Therefore the Security Council should quickly refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

In Austria, many people think Daesh is far away and chiefly a problem of the Middle East. However, Daesh has already reached our homes via YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. It is globally recruiting foreign fighters, and the attacks in Paris and Copenhagen have proven that nobody is safe. Daesh poses a threat to our partners in the Middle East, threatens wider international security and is a direct threat to our societies.

Austria is taking action and intensifying international cooperation especially with the Western Balkan countries. Last week, we adopted an action plan to confront jihadism together with all Western Balkan States. It includes, for example, closer cooperation among law enforcement authorities, enhanced border security, and joint efforts to remove terrorist content from the Internet.

If we want to succeed in decreasing the tensions within our societies, it is not enough to fight Daesh. We have to do more. First, we have to make clear that this is not a conflict between the Western and the Muslim worlds, or between different religious beliefs. Rather, it is a conflict between all of us and terrorism.

Secondly, we have to stand up for religious freedom and coexistence. There is no natural law that Muslims,

Jews and Christians cannot live together peacefully. We therefore have to use all channels of intercultural and interreligious dialogue, and we have to encourage religious leaders of each country to raise their voices when people are being persecuted for their beliefs.

Thirdly, we also have to be credible and live our values. We have to make it clear that diversity is an integral part of our culture. There is, for instance, an ongoing debate on whether Islam is part of Europe or not. The answer is clear: yes, it is, just as Judaism and Christianity are part of the Middle East. It is possible to be a proud European citizen and a believing Muslim at the same time. This is also true for any other religious group in any other part of the world.

We must not allow our societies to be divided. We must stand up against all forms of intolerance and radicalization, and we have to be united in our fight against terrorism. In all the above points the United Nations can and should play an even greater role. I can assure you that Austria will continue to contribute to that effort with all the means at its disposal.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Consular of Canada.

Ms. Yelich (Canada): I thank French Foreign Minister Fabius for mobilizing the Security Council and international community today.

It is crucial that we address the widespread persecution of religious and ethnic groups in the Middle East and the wider region, particularly those acts committed by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and other terrorist groups.

The region, known as the "cradle of civilization", has long been home to great cultural and religious diversity, characterized by the coexistence of Sunni and Shia Muslims, Christians, Yazidis and a host of others. ISIL and other terrorist groups seek to wipe out that diversity. We watched in shock as tens of thousands of Yazidis were stranded on Mount Sinjar last August, fleeing for their lives. In February, we witnessed the beheading of 21 Coptic Orthodox Christians in Libya, murdered by ISIL simply because of their religion. More recently, ISIL kidnapped hundreds of Assyrian Christians in north-eastern Syria. ISIL has destroyed churches, monasteries and other sites of religious significance, including the tomb of Jonah — a site revered by Christians and Muslims alike. This week also marks the one-year anniversary of the desecration of Armenian Christian religious sites in Kessab, Syria, at the hands of terrorists affiliated with Al-Qaida. And of course, ISIL and its ideology of hatred have directly threatened the citizens of countries around the world, including Canada. These are attacks on the global community, and by some estimates the near total disappearance of Christians from the region is unfolding.

The latest report from the High Commissioner for Human Rights is stark. It states that ISIL may have committed all three of the most serious international crimes: war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. As we have heard again today, ISIL's territorial expansion and religious persecution have been characterized by acts of barbarism: executions, gross acts of sexual and gender-based violence, and mass displacement.

Canada condemns those acts in the strongest possible terms. They are an affront to human dignity, to our shared values and to the very principles upon which the United Nations was founded. We stand in solidarity with the victims, whose only supposed crime was to oppose ISIL's warped ideology of hatred and oppression. Left unchecked, like cancer this extremism will only grow and spread. We cannot fail to respond, to protect our citizens and principles, to support the people of the region who seek to preserve the pluralism and diversity that we embrace, and to hold the perpetrators of those heinous crimes accountable.

Together with our allies and partners in the region, Canada is taking a stand to support the Iraqi State, maintain stability in the region and halt ISIL's campaign of terrorism. And of course, Canada is part of the international effort to counter ISIL and ensure that Canadians at home are safe. For that reason, Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs yesterday tabled a motion in Parliament to extend our mission against ISIL.

Tragically, ISIL's actions are part of a wider global trend of increased persecution of religious minorities and growing restrictions on freedom of religion or belief. Through Canada's Office of Religious Freedom, we are speaking out on behalf of persecuted religious communities, opposing religious hatred and advancing pluralism. The need for this effort has never been greater. Without tolerance and religious freedom, there is little hope for the establishment of stable democracy grounded in respect for human rights and the rule

of law. That is why the threat of continued religious persecution at the hands of ISIL is so severe. The killings and displacements seek not only to erase the presence of religious and ethnic communities, but also to undermine the basis for lasting peace and stability.

Accordingly, Canada considers the protection of persecuted religious groups and the promotion of religious freedom as imperative from both a peace and security, as well as a human rights perspective. We therefore welcome France's initiative to convene today's debate. We support strengthened efforts by the United Nations and this Council to address persecution on religious or ethnic grounds. Those efforts include briefings by the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation in Iraq and the wider region, as well as the Council's mandate on conflict prevention, given that restrictions on freedom of religion or belief fuel conflict and extremism. We also support efforts to hold accountable the perpetrators of egregious human rights violations, and to sanction those who provide financial and material support to terrorist groups such as ISIL. Canada further supports the recommendation of the High Commissioner for Human Rights that the Security Council address, in the strongest terms, any information that points to genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Today's meeting provides us with an opportunity to stand up for what is right and just, to defend the values of freedom, pluralism and mutual respect — values that speak to a universal truth grounded in the inalienable dignity of all people. We must counter and discredit the extremist ideology of ISIL, which craves a culture of impunity and violence, and seeks to rule by brutal and barbaric intimidation. We must speak up for religious and ethnic diversity — a diversity that ISIL seeks to destroy — and recognize the imperative of religious freedom or belief in our efforts to achieve lasting peace and stability in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Armenia.

Mr. Hovakimian (Armenia): First of all, I would like to thank the French presidency of the Security Council and Mr. Fabius personally for this timely initiative to discuss the deterioration of the situation of the ethnic and religious groups in certain parts of the Middle East.

We are facing a new and evolving threat in the Middle East in the form of mass and grave human rights violations targeting ethnic and religious groups and their members. It is disappointing that on the eve of the seventieth anniversary of the United Nations, after such tremendous efforts to strengthen peace and security, tolerance, prosperity, fundamental rights and freedoms, we must deal with this newly emerging wave of violence, vandalism and hatred in a part of the world that is the cradle of world civilization.

It was 100 years ago that three countries, which are currently permanent members of the Security Council, coined the term "crime against humanity and civilization" in relation to the mass extermination of a religious and ethnic group in the Middle East. Unfortunately, the use of that term is relevant to current realities as well. The concerted attempts of terrorist groups, including foreign terrorist fighters, to deprive religious and ethnic groups of their life, property, religion, culture and memory can indeed be qualified as a crime against humanity and civilization.

On 21 March 2014, Al-Qaida-affiliated terrorist groups attacked the predominately Armenian and millennia-old town of Kassab, situated on the border between Syria and Turkey, resulting in the forced expulsion of the local population from their homes. The extremist groups have desecrated and vandalized Kassab's Armenian religious and cultural heritage. A number of other violent acts took place against Christians and other minorities, including the beheading of 21 Egyptian Copts and brutal attacks against Assyrians in Syria and the killing and oppression of the Yazidi minority by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist group in the Mont Sinjar region in Iraq. We all saw the chilling video footage of ISIL militants smashing 2,700-year-old statues in the Mosul museum, followed by their barbaric destruction of the Nineveh museum and other artefacts of ancient art and culture in Iraq and Syria.

The full implementation of resolutions 2170 (2014), 2178 (2014) and 2199 (2015) is essential in the prevention of massive and grave human rights violations against religious and ethnic groups. Armenia, as a nation that survived the first genocide of the twentieth century, has a moral responsibility towards the protection of collective and individual rights of religious and ethnic groups and their members, particularly in situations where their survival is at stake.

Genocide prevention is a high priority for Armenia. Over recent years, we have tried to mainstream issues of genocide prevention in efforts for international cooperation on security and human rights. We are glad that, two hours ago, the Human Rights Council adopted by consensus an important resolution on genocide prevention, which was sponsored by Armenia and 64 other States. The issues of education on and remembrance of genocide are important in the prevention of mass atrocities against religious and ethnic groups. It is not a coincidence that those who are engaged in mass atrocities against religious and ethnic groups associate themselves with the denial and justification of previous genocides.

On 24 April and throughout the year, the centennial of the Armenian genocide in the Ottoman Empire will be commemorated around the world. A Syrian town, Dayr Al-Zour, and its surrounding desert was the final destination of the death march of hundreds of thousands of the victims of the Armenian genocide. Every year, the Saint Martyrs Armenian church in Dayr Al-Zour, which was a sanctuary for the remains of many victims, used to be one of the main places of commemoration. However, in this centennial year, it will not be possible to pay tribute to the victims in Dayr Al-Zour, since in September 2014 terrorist groups destroyed the church and vandalized the holy site. The destruction of the Saint Martyrs church is a symbolic link between old and new crimes. Faced with the continuity of such evil deeds across time and space, we must demonstrate our unreserved human solidarity with the victims of those crimes. In the name of humanity and civilization, we should fight and defeat fear, dehumanization and denial.

We are here today first to strongly condemn the violations we have witnessed in recent times in the Middle East and to commit ourselves fully in the fight against ISIL, the Nusra Front and other derivatives and associates of Al-Qaida. The international community should work hard to address the gaps in the protection of religious and ethnic groups and empower their members to enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms and continue their valuable contribution to humanity and civilization.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the European Union Special Representative for Human Rights.

Mr. Lambrinidis (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU).

In February 2015, the Security Council firmly condemned the barbaric terrorist acts perpetrated by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), or Daesh, and reiterated its determination to defeat that terrorist group.

(*spoke in English*)

That is indeed my first point — condemnation. We must unequivocally condemn, as we have done in this Chamber, such acts of violence. Everyone must do so: politicians, no matter what their political beliefs; people, no matter what their ethnicity; and religious leaders, no matter what their religion. That condemnation pulls the rug from under the feet of those who believe that they can be justified in using violence. We have underlined the importance of preserving the multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-confessional character of the Syrian and Iraqi societies.

The European Union supports international efforts and initiatives to address those issues and welcomes in this regard today's ministerial-level meeting. I would also extend our warm congratulations to France. We are united in support for the work of the Council, in particular its resolutions 2170 (2014) and 2178 (2014), and call on all countries to swiftly implement those resolutions with full respect for human rights and the rule of law.

That brings me to my second point. Respect for human rights, the promotion of inclusive and democratic societies, and support to vibrant civil societies are the only way to guarantee full security and stability for all people in the region. That obligation is even greater when it comes to protecting the rights of girls and women. Terrorists hate those things because they deprive them of the monopoly of power. Human rights give power to the powerless, and they do not want that. If you want to fight terrorism, just look at what they hate and support it. If you want to fight terrorism, support human rights. If you want to fight terrorism, educate girls. If you want to fight terrorism, empower women.

My third point is that we have to counter extremist discourse. Tackling terrorism means countering those places where extremism resonates. This is a security challenge, without a doubt, but we should not forget its political, social and cultural dimensions. We must redouble our efforts in reaching out to those who might be vulnerable to the discourse of violent extremism. If we want to stop the cycle of violence and human rights

abuse, we must also address their root causes and work further for the realization of all human rights.

My fourth point is that, in the Middle East, grave violations committed against the civilian population demand accountability, justice and an end to impunity. The European Union welcomed the ninth report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/28/69) and condemns the crimes against humanity and human rights violations and abuses detailed therein, perpetrated in particular by the Al-Assad regime and terrorist groups. We support the renewal of the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry. We also support the documentation of crimes in Syria to ensure that all perpetrators are held accountable.

The European Union reiterates its call on the Security Council to refer the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court. We would also like to take the opportunity to pay a special tribute to Syrian human rights defenders, especially women human rights defenders, for their tremendous commitment and tireless efforts in documenting human rights violations. The actions of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Daesh are horrific and cannot go unpunished, nor will they.

My fifth point relates to the fundamental human rights of the freedom of religion and belief. The kidnapping of more than 200 Christian Assyrians in the Hassakeh region of Syria at the end of February was just the most recent in Daesh's long list of brutal actions that may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity, according to the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic. All of this is in complete contravention of international human rights law and goes directly against the freedom of religion and belief, which includes the right of persons of all faiths to live and practise their religion freely or not to believe, for that matter, without fear of intolerance or attacks. In that context, the European Union would like to express its deep appreciation for the work done by Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Mr. Heiner Bielefeldt, including his latest annual report (A/HRC/28/66), and by Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, High Commissioner for Human Rights, and his Office.

In terms of numbers, the first victims of Daesh were Sunni Muslims. We must not forget that. At the same time, it is clear that Daesh poses a specific and more deliberate threat to minorities in the region: Christians, but also Yazidis, Shabak and other groups. Daesh tries to brand theirs as a clash of civilizations, and of course nothing could be further from the truth. It is not some clash of civilizations that has resulted in the terrorist atrocities; it is those terrorist atrocities that are attempting to create a clash of civilizations among us. We cannot allow that to happen. We will not. If we fall into that trap, we will be falling into the hands of the terrorists. That, of course, will not happen.

My sixth point is that we also denounce the attacks on and destruction of world heritage sites and the illicit trafficking in cultural properties. That is why, on numerous occasions, we have expressed our determination to contain and defeat Daesh and to contribute as fully as possible, both at the individual level of Member States and the collective level of the European Union, to the efforts of the global coalition.

Finally, my last and seventh point is that military action is essential, but not sufficient on its own. It is necessary to address the underlying violence in Syria and Iraq, which has given terrorist groups a foothold. This is where the European Union strategy to fight the scourge comes in. At the most recent meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council, European Union Foreign Ministers adopted a strategy outlining how the EU is planning to counter the threat posed by ISIL and help restore peace and security in Syria and Iraq. The EU aims at a comprehensive effort to address the underlying dynamics of the conflicts, through diplomacy and support for political reforms, economic development and reconciliation among various ethnic groups.

For the years 2015 and 2016, the European Commission has allocated €1 billion to the implementation of the strategy. We will also follow up on the outcome of the Washington, D.C., Summit on Countering Violent Extremism, in particular by fostering cooperation. That includes education, by engaging more with local communities, especially in the Horn of Africa. We held our annual plenary session of the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum Horn of Africa Working Group, in Kampala on 17 to 20 March.

(*spoke in French*)

I would like to add a final word on lasting peace and stability. We are engaged in in-depth discussions with respect to the actions to be pursued in the post-2015 agenda. An agenda conveying genuine transformation must address the importance of peace in society and the

elimination of violence. There can be no peace without development and respect for human rights.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Cyprus.

Mr. Christodoulides (Cyprus): At the outset, I wish to congratulate France for its initiative in organizing this timely open debate, focusing on the open wound of attacks and abuses on ethnic or religious grounds in the Middle East.

Cyprus aligns itself with the statement just delivered on behalf of the European Union and would like to add comments from its national standpoint.

Around a century ago, the poet Constantine Cavafy, who lived in Alexandria, Egypt, in his poem *Going Back Home from Greece*, wrote about "our seas,/ the waters of Cyprus, Syria and Egypt,/ the beloved waters of our home countries", and went on to say, "We must not be ashamed of the Syrian and Egyptian blood in our veins;/ we should really honour it, take pride in it". I have cited this poem, as just one of the many examples of the cultural richness of the Middle East, a birthplace of great civilizations and religions and an area of spiritual fermentation and fertilization. This cultural mosaic has been the product of thousands of years of coexistence, even in times of conflict, in an area that had always been the bone of contention between and regional and international powers.

Today, we are yet again experiencing tremendous turmoil in the Middle East. This debate is an opportunity to reflect upon the root causes of the unrest. In order to do so, we must avoid the trap of confining ourselves to the developments in a specific region. Ethnic and religious clashes are nowadays a source or a pretext for nearly every conflict around the world. It is also being invoked as the ideological basis of terrorism, intolerance, discrimination, racism and all forms of hatred. If this scourge is not tackled decisively, if it remains unaddressed, it will soon have such spillover effects that will render the whole situation as entirely out of control.

The times demand courageous measures by all States individually as well as by the international community collectively. All that we are witnessing in the wider region of the Middle East, particularly following the emergence of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham (ISIS), or Daesh, and the perpetration of its untold atrocities should not leave us indifferent or passive.

As the Syrian conflict enters its fifth year, it is evident that long-term oppression, intolerance and lack of inclusiveness have cultivated the ground for the flourishing of terrorism. The incomprehensible violence caused by ISIL/Daesh, and other terrorist groups, as well as the different militias, has created a huge humanitarian crisis. It is vital that the international community sends a clear and strong messages condemning terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, including the organizers, financiers and sponsors of acts of terrorism.

In Iraq, although the situation seems to be getting under control, there a lot remainsto be done. ISIL/Daesh can be defeated only if there is political unity and a common fight against terrorism. Cyprus believes that addressing the security and political crisis in the country is key not only to its stability but also to regional safety and security. The recent horrific and brutal acts of terrorism in Libya have showcased once again that terrorism knows no borders. We have witnessed how destructive ISIL has been in Iraq and Syria, and unfortunately, it has found fertile ground in the growing post-revolution political instability in Libya. The gravity of the situation in Libya must prompt action in support of the political process in that country. To restore stability, a political solution to the Libyan crisis is a sine qua non.

The problem of religious persecution is most pronounced in parts of the Middle East in the current turbulent times, especially in places where conflict is raging and extremist terrorist groups are active. A resolute stance for the principle of religious freedom everywhere is extremely important. Religious belief is fundamental to many human identities. Freedom of faith must be defended, irrespective of whether the attacks come from totalitarian atheist regimes or theocracies. For the faithful, what they believe about God is inseparable from what they understand about human beings. But God's rights must never be allowed to trample on human rights.

We have aligned ourselves with the international coalition against terrorism, and we have been active in promoting actions aimed at protecting the ancient communities and the religious and ethnic minorities of the Middle East. Our long tradition as a constructive

and stabilizing factor in the region is acknowledged by all.

It is our duty towards humanity and our shared values to steadfastly adopt a more proactive political involvement, so as to save future generations from the plague of blind hatred. For us, it is also a historical responsibility to our ancestors and the beloved waters of our homelands.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Mr. Gokcen (Organization of Islamic Cooperation): I shall be very brief. A longer version of my statement will be circulated.

Let me start by conveying the deep gratitude of the Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Mr. Iyad Madani, to His Excellency Minister Fabius for the initiative he has taken and for the thoughtful invitation. Unfortunately, due to his attendance at the Arab Summit today, Secretary-General Madani is not able to personally attend this important open debate.

The alarming developments in Syria and Iraq should not be seen as a civilizational or religious confrontation. Tragedies and violence have negatively affected every single citizen in those countries and caused a massive loss of human lives and great suffering. However, the start of the terror campaign by Daesh, which targets in particular Christian and Yazidi Iraqi citizens and includes forced deportations under the threat of execution, constitutes a serious threat aimed at tearing apart the social fabric of the Iraqi people.

The OIC Secretary-General has on every occasion publicly condemned the inhuman acts committed by Daesh and the forced displacements, which he qualified as a crime that cannot be tolerated. He has also been very straightforward in stating that Daesh's practices have nothing to do with Islam and its principles, which call for justice, kindness, fairness, freedom of faith and coexistence.

Christians and other religious minorities in the Middle East are a constituent component of their nations as citizens who have or should have equal rights to security, welfare and a decent life, like their other compatriots. They have been an integral part of the social fabric, culture, struggles and achievements, as well as past and future narratives, of their nations. Additionally, in line with the deep-rooted tradition of coexistence in the region, Christian clergy in Iraq and Syria lived with honour and dignity and enthusiastically shared the aspirations of their compatriots to peace and prosperity. Religious and ethnic minorities in the Middle East are valuable assets for their countries. It would be a great loss for those countries as well as for humankind as a whole if these precious examples of religious pluralism, harmonious coexistence and multiculturalism of the region were lost.

It is vital that religious leaders, as the moral leaders of their communities, play a responsible role in ensuring communal peace and harmony. In that regard, let me underline two important initiatives supported by the OIC whereby religious leaders from the region have united in solidarity.

First, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Regional Interreligious Council — the Religions for Peace-MENA Council — remains the only regional multi-religious mechanism that is led by the religious leaders of the region's religious communities to advance citizenship, religious freedom and the protection of minorities.

As a result of a process involving a series of consultations, it developed MENA-region-specific but separate Islamic, Christian and Jewish religious warrants in support of citizenship, and OIC-sponsored Human Rights Council resolution 16/18, on the protection of vulnerable minorities.

Secondly, in an unprecedented demonstration of multi-religious solidarity, religious communities from Iraq, Syria and the larger Middle East region were convened by the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue at a conference held in Vienna, "United against Violence in the Name of Religion", on 19 November 2014.

At the end of the conference, religious leaders from Sunni, Shiite, Christian, Mandean and Yazidi communities across the Middle East jointly issued the Vienna declaration, entitled "United against Violence in the Name of Religion", to denounce, with one voice, all violence committed in the name of religion. They called on the international community to protect religious and cultural diversity in Iraq and Syria. This was a praiseworthy occasion, when religious leaders representing different religions from a crisis region came together as one to denounce oppression,

marginalization, persecution and killings in the name of religion.

In conclusion, I would like to say that recent developments in the Middle East, Africa and South-East Asia in particular have shown us that despite all of the positive efforts towards deepening and transforming interfaith dialogue into practical cooperation, we should be mindful that the exploitation for political aims of religious sentiments and perceptions of injustice and past grievances might easily alter conflicts and cause them to acquire religious connotations. We must encourage interfaith initiatives to develop capacity and mechanisms in order to play a preventive role in these types of slippery situations.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Guatemala.

Ms. Bolaños Pérez (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to begin by expressing our appreciation for the participation of France's Minister for Foreign Affairs in this open debate, which tackles an issue that affects the entire international community: the persecution of minorities and the need to preserve cultural diversity, in this case focusing on the Middle East. We are also grateful to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and to the other keynote speakers for their important statements earlier in this debate.

Guatemala is of the firm conviction that diplomacy and dialogue are the best means to achieve a long-term solution to each of the conflicts affecting the Middle East region. We are convinced that a political solution to the differences that for years have divided this region is the only path to lasting stability and security.

However, we must be aware that the conflicts in the region are now more complex, most of the time involving non-State actors, which leads to varied and complex situations. Over time, the clashes, battles and killings taking place in the streets of various cities in the Middle East have ushered in a reign of terror among the civilian population. Each day we see even more disregard for the basic elements of the human condition. We are deeply moved by each unnecessary death, especially those of women and children, as well as the ethnic and religious violence being experienced in the region. My country firmly condemns all acts of violence.

For almost four years now, we have seen an ever-increasing number of reports of violence perpetrated by non-State actors and terrorist groups, especially the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and other associated groups against civilian populations in the Middle East. These groups are committing war crimes, crimes against humanity and possibly genocide against ethnic and religious minorities in the region. The Christian, Yazidi, Kurd, Turkmen, Shabaki and even Sunni and Shiite communities suffer brutal persecution at the hands of these groups, which threaten their future and right to remain in the region. This is in addition to the already precarious conditions that these communities live in, after years of living in areas where political conflicts are being waged, as we see in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya.

Against this background, the international community is now faced with the atrocity and brutality of the crimes committed by ISIL and other associated groups. The killing of civilians, abductions, rapes, torture, trafficking in women and children and the forced recruitment of children are but a few of the serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law that have been committed intentionally and systematically against ethnic and religious minorities. We reaffirm these people's inalienable right to continue to live in their own country in peace, freedom, equality and dignity. We also condemn such groups' deliberate destruction of irreplaceable religious and cultural objects. We call for an end to the destruction of Iraq and Syria's cultural heritage, including the selective destruction of religious sites and objects, as well as the looting and illicit trafficking in such assets, which generates income for the groups, particularly since the proceeds obtained are then used for recruitment and to strengthen their operational capacity.

Combating impunity must continue to be a fundamental aspect of our efforts not just to respond to serious violations based on ethnic and religious motives but also to prevent them. The International Criminal Court can help in our efforts to counter impunity. In that regard, my delegation believes that the Security Council must be willing to assign responsibility in a consistent manner and to afford justice to all the innocent people affected by the actions of groups fuelled by hatred and violence.

At the same time, the international community must do everything it can to eliminate the threat posed by such groups. We must be steadfast in our commitment to supporting the advancement of existing political

processes, while emphasizing the importance of suppressing ethnic and religious hatred that demonizes and excludes the other and instead supporting tolerance and mutual respect among different racial and religious groups. That is why we reacted positively to the Secretary-General's announcement this morning that he would be establishing an advisory panel on these issues.

In conclusion, we are aware of the enormous challenges involved in stopping the threat that radicalization and violence pose to ethnic and religious groups. However, it is our political and historical responsibility, as Member States of the international community, to support every possible means of achieving that goal. We also have an obligation to promote truth, enlightenment and responsibility to all those responsible for such violations and above all to do our utmost to prevent further atrocities.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Hungary.

Ms. Bogyay (Hungary): I would like to thank France and you, Mr. President, for convening this timely open debate. I also wish to today's participants in the meeting for their informative, expressive, powerful and emotional briefings.

While fully supporting the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union, I would also like to add a few observations in my national capacity.

The intentional and systematic targeting of members of ethnic and religious communities threatens not only peace and security but the very existence of minorities in the Middle East. Increased religious violence has already led to a mass exodus of Christians, Yazidis and members of other ethnic and religious minorities from their homelands. The preservation of the region's multi-religious, multi-ethnic and multi-confessional character is of the utmost importance to the maintenance of peace and security. Hungary strongly supports all initiatives aimed at defeating Daesh and other terrorist groups. We believe that a comprehensive plan of action on the part of the international community, ideally under the auspices of the United Nations, is essential to preventing attacks on and abuses of ethnic and religious groups.

Hungary has offered humanitarian aid to the Christian communities and Kurdistan authorities in Iraq, contributed financial and material support to ease the refugee crisis in and around Syria, and provided immediate financial support to the families of the Egyptian Coptic Christians beheaded in Libya. We also support military efforts against Daesh and other terrorist groups, and are currently examining other ways to contribute to accomplishing security tasks in the region. We strongly support the enforcement of accountability for serious crimes and are convinced that there should be no impunity for the horrendous acts committed by Daesh and other terrorist groups in the Middle East in Syria, Iraq, Libya and elsewhere.

Hungary welcomes and encourages the efforts of the Government of Iraq to investigate all allegations of violations of international humanitarian law and human rights, and strongly recommends making the investigation findings public and ensuring that they lead to effective remedies for the victims. We believe that such investigations should be conducted into all perpetrators, not only Daesh. Bearing in mind that primary responsibility lies with the Iraqi State, Hungary believes that Iraq's acceptance of the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC) under paragraph 3 of article 12 of the Rome Statute could also be an option in the fight against impunity. While we note that Hungary was one of the first countries to raise the possibility of that option, as long ago as September, we welcome the fact that in its recently published report (A/HRC/28/18) the investigative mission to Iraq of the Office of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights arrived at the same conclusion. With regard to the crimes committed in Libya, the Hungarian Government has requested that the Prosecutor of the ICC expand her investigations — originally initiated as a result of the Security Council's referral in 2011 — into the recent execution of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians.

Finally, as my country's former Permanent Representative to UNESCO and former President of its General Conference, I feel compelled to denounce in the strongest terms the deliberate destruction of cultural and religious sites and artifacts by Daesh and associated groups in Iraq. Such attacks on the cultural heritage of humankind also constitute war crimes. They should be investigated, provided that a legal basis for the investigations is established either by a Security Council referral or by Iraq's acceptance of the jurisdiction of the Court. That is very important to us.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Alhakim (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank France for its efforts in organizing today's meeting and shedding light on the humanitarian tragedy that has resulted from the actions of Daesh in Iraq and the region. I would also like to express the thanks and greetings of my Minister for Foreign Affairs to His Excellency Mr. Laurent Fabius, Minister for Foreign Affairs of France.

My delegation would also like to express its condolences to the clergy and the Assyrian Church of the East on the death of Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV. We welcome the presence of Patriarch Sako and of Mrs. Dakhil, a member of the Iraqi Parliament, at this important meeting, and we thank Mrs. Dakhil for her accurate and impressive remarks.

Iraq is proud of its millennia-old traditions built on a multiplicity of cultures, religions and ethnicities, represented by, for instance, the abundance of artifacts on its land as well as the various elements that make up its people, who have evolved in ethnic, cultural and religious diversity. Our new Constitution states that all Iraqis are equal before the law, with no discrimination on the basis of race, nationality or gender, and that all have the right to life, security and freedom.

The events that Iraq has experienced in recent years and whose repercussions have increased following the growth of the terrorist group known as Daesh, pose a double threat to Iraqis as a whole and religious minorities in particular. This danger threatens the traditions of coexistence that have reigned in Iraq throughout its history. The various segments of the Iraqi population, distinguished by their religious identities — Christians, Yazidis, Shabak, Baha'i, Feylis, Sunni and Shia — or by their ethnic identities — Arab, Kurd and Turkmen — are all part of the indigenous population and form the basis of the Iraqi civilization. They are also part of the inclusive elected Government, which includes all elements of Iraqi society. Since my Government was established and Prime Minister Haider Al Abadi took office, they have fostered national unity and the future and security of the country by providing Iraqi citizens with a decent and dignified life characterized by the rule of law.

In Iraq today, human existence is seriously threatened. We must fight that threat. Daesh has taken control by force, despite the existing regional and international systems. It has managed to extend its power over large areas of Iraq and Syria. It has become a serious threat to those States and their territorial integrity. Daesh initially targeted religious minorities — Christians, Yazidis, Kurds, Feylis and Shias. Since then, its crimes have engulfed all segments of the Iraqi population without exception.

The events of 2014 are a case in point. It was not enough for Daesh to kill Iraqis and seize their property, but it also carried out systemic aggression against private places of worship, mosques and churches and destroyed Iraqi monuments. The degrading practices espoused by that bloody organization have multiplied and include forced displacement. Members of Daesh consider others to be unbelievers and force them to embrace their dogma. They rape women and abduct children who refuse to comply with their laws. Thousands of Yazidi and Christian girls have been abducted and sold as prisoners in the areas under Daesh control. Thousands of Shia, Sunni, Shabak and Sabians have been victims of the brutal actions perpetrated by Daesh, such as killings and terror. The violence, persecution, displacement and killing to which the Iraqi population is subject could unravel the Iraqi social fabric and threaten the stability and harmony among Iraqis. No group will be safe unless the terrorist organizations that fuel sectarian tensions, tear society apart and destroy coexistence are eliminated.

The brutal actions perpetrated by Daesh can only be described as war crimes, crimes against humanity and even genocide. This was mentioned in the Human Rights Council report (A/HRC/28/18) that was issued only days ago. At the beginning of the week, the Iraqi Cabinet declared the crimes perpetrated by Daesh against segments of the Iraqi population to be genocide.

As a result of the heinous crimes perpetrated by Daesh, hundreds of thousands of Iraqi citizens have been displaced and forced them to flee their country as refugees. Therefore, Iraq is losing the diversity of its culture and civilization that it has enjoyed for thousands of years. Consequently, we must put an end to the phenomenon of forced migration. The solution does not lie in removing Yazidis, Christians and others from Iraq. That simply signifies a victory for Takfiri thinking, which is aimed at tearing Iraq apart and eliminating its cultural, ethnic and religious diversity. On the contrary, we must put an end to this phenomenon by extirpating the terrorist Daesh entity.

The situation of internally displaced persons in Iraq remains tragic and critical. It requires greater

relief efforts and solidarity to alleviate their suffering by liberating the areas under the terrorists' control and ensuring the triumph of the message of love and tolerance and the preservation of the dignity of Iraqis, regardless of their religious or national identities, which are being targeted by extremist terrorist thinking.

In conclusion, Iraq endeavours to ensure the respect for and protection of basic rights and freedom of religion, as enshrined in the Iraqi Constitution. We also seek to eliminate the radical thinking that hinders peaceful coexistence. Iraq looks forward to the day when all Iraqis are able to freely practice their religions without fear, be it in the Yazidi temples or by praying in mosques, hussainias or churches.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mr. Guilherme de Aguiar Patriota (Brazil) (*spoke in French*): We thank the delegation of France for organizing this open debate.

(*spoke in English*)

I thank the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner for Human Rights for their important presentations.

The widespread and systematic persecution of individuals on ethnic and religious grounds is one of the ugliest aspects of the recent surge of violent extremism in the Middle East and elsewhere. Innocent civilians are always the first victims of intolerance. The reports of barbaric acts, including targeted killings, forced conversions, kidnapping, slavery, sexual abuses and torture committed by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and its associated groups are deeply shocking. The international community cannot remain indifferent in the face of such acts of savagery.

Brazil strongly condemns the persecution of individuals on the basis of their ethnicity or belief. We reject any act of intolerance or incitement to religious or ethnic hatred. We also repudiate the unjustifiable destruction of religious and cultural heritage. As a pluricultural, multi-ethnic nation that assumes diversity as a defining trait of its identity, Brazil is committed to full equality of the rights of people, regardless of religion or faith. Our identity is the product of the contributions of various cultures and civilizations that were brought to bear on our history, starting with indigenous populations, Europeans, the decisive African heritage and significant waves of immigration. We have learned the lessons of history and above all the value of diversity and the extent to which it represents an asset.

The indication that crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide may have been committed by the ISIL in Iraq, as pointed out by the High Commissioner for Human Rights in his report, is particularly outrageous. The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, led by Mr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, has also documented the savagery perpetrated by ISIL against the Syrian people. Because of their religion or ethnicity, hundreds of thousands of people had to flee their homes and their countries to escape from the cruelty imposed by ISIL and are in desperate need of humanitarian assistance.

This violence and destruction must end. All efforts should be undertaken to stop and ensure accountability for the human rights violations and violations of international law and humanitarian law committed by extremists. Fighting impunity is crucial to prevent the recurrence of abuses and violations. Brazil co-sponsored the interregional declaration recently delivered in the Human Rights Council on supporting the human rights of Christians and other communities in the Middle East. Brazil's support reflects its concern with the severe violations of human rights of Christians and other minorities, religious groups and several individuals who have been victims of intolerance, discrimination and violence in the region.

Violent extremism is a multidimensional threat. It will only be efficiently countered if we take into consideration its underlying causes, in particular those associated with protracted social, political, economic and cultural strife. Where political instability, poverty and exclusion reign, there will be fertile ground for the spread and growth of violent extremism.

Overcoming this threat necessarily involves diplomatic efforts founded on justice to bring peace to conflicts that directly or indirectly fuel terrorist agendas. The Middle East and the whole world can no longer bear the burden of unresolved conflicts, such as the one between Israel and Palestine. It is time for a political solution, not weapons, to prevail in Syria. In Libya and Yemen, the international community should be united in condemning violence and working with the parties to engage in dialogue and reach a peaceful solution to their differences.

As in many items on our agenda, we are convinced that we will succeed only if we join efforts on the basis of shared values and enhanced multilateral cooperation. Fighting extremism and protecting ethnic and religious groups must be done in full compliance with international human rights law, international humanitarian law and international refugee law. Bending the rules and invoking exceptional rights weaken the multilateral system and have brought much misery to civilians. One cannot escape the fact that the current situation was partially fuelled by the social, political and institutional disarray resulting from a history of foreign interventions and misconceived strategies for the Middle East.

The importance of dialogue among different religions and cultures cannot be overstated. Initiatives such as the Alliance of Civilizations, which promotes tolerance and mutual respect, can contribute to dispelling stereotypes that tend to associate terrorism with specific cultures, religions or ethnic groups. We must all be wary of dangerous rhetoric and narratives that fuel xenophobia and prejudice. Brazil joins those Governments around the world that have risen against such distortions.

The President (*spoke in French*): I would remind all delegations that there are still 38 names on the list of speakers and that we have another meeting after this one. I therefore invite speakers to respect the four minute time limit.

I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Prosor (Israel): Next week, Jewish people around the world will celebrate Passover, which commemorates the exodus story. In recent years, another exodus story has unfolded, but this one is driven by a plague of persecution aimed at the Christians, Kurds, Yazidis, Baha'is and, of course, the Jews.

For more than 2,500 years, 1 million Jews lived peacefully in Arab lands. In 1947, the situation changed dramatically. Following the United Nations vote to establish a Jewish State (General Assembly resolution 181 (II)), Arab Governments turned on their Jewish citizens. From Baghdad to Sana'a to Tripoli, thousands of Jews were murdered in violent riots and hundreds of thousands more were forced to run for their lives. Radical Islamists have a saying: "First the Saturday people, then the Sunday people". Having succeeded in driving the vast majority of Jews out of Arab lands, extremists have turned on the Christians. At the turn of the twentieth century, Christians comprised 26 per cent of the Middle East's population. Today, that figure is less than 10 per cent.

The Nineveh plains in Iraq had been home to Christians since the first century. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) tore through the region, desecrating churches and destroying artefacts. Christians were given the grim choice of converting to Islam or facing death by beheading, stoning or crucifixion. Fearing for their lives, tens of thousands of Christians have fled to northern Iraq and taken refuge in Kurdistan. Kurdish forces are fighting valiantly to defend their homes and push back the extremist threat. In December, Kurdish fighters broke the ISIS siege of Mount Sinjar, freeing thousands of Yazidis and Christians. The Kurds are the leading force in the fight against ISIS. They have shown tremendous courage and fortitude. The Kurds need the support of the international community and they deserve political independence.

The persecution of minorities is not taking place just at the hands of extremist groups. Last year, Islamist police in Saudi Arabia stormed a Christian prayer meeting and arrested its entire congregation, including women and children. Arresting someone for praying is like arresting someone for having lunch — one is feeding his hunger and the other is feeding his faith. In 2013, three Iranian Christians caught selling Bibles were found guilty of "crimes against State security" and sentenced to 10 years in prison. Also in 2013, Ayatollah Khamenei issued a *fatwa* in which he branded the Baha'is as deviants. At his direction, Iranian Baha'is are regularly arrested, tortured and denied their most basic rights, including the right to study at university.

There is only one place in the Middle East where minorities have the freedom to practice their faith, change faiths or practice no faith at all — and that is Israel. Israel is home to the Baha'i World Centre. It is the only place in the Middle East where Druze have reached the highest echelons of society. It is the only place where the Christian population is growing. Since Israel's establishment in 1948, its Christian communities have expanded more than 1,000 per cent. Israeli Christians have served in our Parliament and on our Supreme Court.

The same cannot be said for Christians living under the Palestinian leadership. Since Hamas took over Gaza in 2007, half the Christian community

has fled Gaza. After the Palestinian Authority took control of Bethlehem in 1995, Palestinian gunmen seized Christian homes and looted the Church of the Nativity. Owing to this persecution, the city's Christian population has fallen by nearly 70 per cent.

It does not matter where you come from, what faith you belong to, or what politics you preach. No decent human being can ignore the calamity facing minorities in the Middle East. Millions of people around the world put their faith in the United Nations. It is time for the Security Council to break its silence and give them a reason to believe.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Kazakhstan.

Mr. Abdrakhmanov (Kazakhstan): We thank the Secretary-General and the other speakers this morning. We offer our special thanks to the French Presidency for convening today's meeting, as we all need to urgently address the issue of victims of attacks and abuses on religious and ethnic minorities in the Middle East.

We are alarmed that extremist and terrorist groups are creating quasi-State entities to fight against legitimate Governments, sowing enmity and hatred and perpetrating extrajudicial killings, torture, rape, abductions and forcible displacement. My delegation also condemns sexual slavery, forced conversions, the conscription of children and other forms of discrimination and persecution perpetrated against vulnerable groups, in particular women and children. We also express our deep concern about the widespread systematic violation of human rights and the destruction of unique cultural heritage, including sacred shrines, and other abuses.

Kazakhstan believes that the determined and concerted efforts of all Member States and other relevant stakeholders, together with the United Nations taking a leading role, are the only way to combat violent extremism. What is required is a long-term, comprehensive approach involving the entire international community, built on greater regional and global cooperation in accordance with the United Nations Charter and international law.

My delegation endorses the proposal of the Secretary-General for setting up an international panel of experts and that of the French presidency for convening a global conference as a follow-up of today's debate. We join other delegations in calling for greater protection measures for minorities, especially for women and girls, bringing perpetrators to justice and ending all impunity with a greater use of the International Criminal Court. Every effort has to be made to return expelled groups to their homelands with the help of military security, mobilize necessary humanitarian assistance and use every means to limit the activities of terrorist groups, such as seizing their assets, inter alia. The existing resolutions of the Security Council must be followed up with stronger political will. Likewise, United Nations peacekeeping operations must now incorporate experts on religious matters in these specific regions so as to foster interfaith dialogue on the ground.

We need to widely use wisdom and the experience of religious and spiritual leaders to promote mutual respect and harmony in all regions, including in the Middle East. They support and complement political efforts to prevent hatred, intolerance and inhuman crimes. In addition, sound foundations can only be laid by teaching the values of human dignity and freedom at all levels of education.

To avail itself of the potential and authority of spiritual leaders, Kazakhstan every three years convenes the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions as a dialogue platform to promote mutual respect, tolerance and non-discrimination. In June 2015, we will host the fifth Congress devoted to the dialogue of religious and political leaders for peace and development. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is invited to the forum. It will also be attended by political and religious leaders from all over the world. We believe that the outcome of the Congress will contribute to the protection of religious groups, including minorities, in order keep our societies stable. Its recommendations could be considered by the international expert group that was mentioned today.

In conclusion, once again we urgently call on all parties, especially those having real political power and influence, to contribute to lasting peace and security in the Middle East, and freedom and justice for all people.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Bishnoi (India): We thank you, Sir, for having organized today's open debate on the victims of attacks and abuse on ethnic or religious grounds in the Middle East. I would like to compliment you for circulating the useful and well-structured concept note (S/2015/176, annex). I would also like to thank the Secretary-

General, the High Commissioner for Human Rights and other briefers for the background that they have provided.

At the outset, we would like to lend our voice to condemning violence perpetrated in the name of religion and ethnicity in the Middle East and elsewhere. Religious, cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity are essential and indispensable components of the social fabric of human civilization. Persecution on the basis of such diversity strikes at our common humanity.

We express our deep concern over the activities of proscribed outfits and radicalized and extremist groups in the region that are critically impacting on peace and stability while also jeopardizing human rights, fundamental freedoms and the very lives of ethnic, religious and other minority groups. Efforts must be made by all parties and stakeholders in the region to curb these dangerous sectarian and extremist trends. We believe the consolidation of political processes and solutions while building durable State institutions will be the effective way of addressing such extremism and radicalism in the region.

The international community is witness to excesses of terrorism and violent extremism in the Middle East and elsewhere. This further highlights that there can be no justification for terrorism or violent extremism. The need to collectively demonstrate zero tolerance for terrorism and violent extremism has never been greater. The international community must take an unequivocal and resolute position against terrorism and violent extremism — phenomena that are aimed at the destruction of human rights, fundamental freedoms and democracy, and threaten the territorial integrity and security of States.

Further, the issue requires a consolidated, rather than fragmented, approach, including that of developing a legal framework for fighting terrorism at the international level, especially by swiftly adopting the comprehensive convention on international terrorism, as well as developing suitable regulatory frameworks for the prosecution of terrorist outfits and personnel. We recall that in September last year, the Security Council adopted resolution 2178 (2014), which looks into the problem of the foreign terrorist fighters. We believe that the Council needs to act robustly using the instruments of law that it has at its disposal and the information available to it to counter terrorism and maintain international peace and security.

The primary responsibility to promote and protect human rights rests with States. It is imperative that we fully respect the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all States Members of the United Nations when considering our response. Member States, for their part, should continue to take steps that are policy-oriented and legal in nature, to ensure principles of equality and non-discrimination for all their citizens and to combat intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons based on religion or belief.

In conclusion, we would like to reiterate that there can be no justification for terrorism in any form. The menace of terrorism has to be fought on all fronts and in all places. There is also no place for violence in the name of religion and ethnicity. Member States and the international community should leave no stone unturned in promoting and protecting the human rights of all citizens to continue living in their own countries, in peace, freedom, equality and dignity.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Bulgaria.

Mr. Tafrov (Bulgaria) (*spoke in French*): My delegation associates itself with the statement of the European Union delivered earlier by the European Union Special Representative for Human Rights. I would like to add some remarks in my national capacity, echoing some of the sentiments expressed earlier in the ideas of the Secretary-General and Minister Laurent Fabius.

I warmly commend France for having taken the initiative to organize this important debate. The systematic and widespread persecution conducted by Daesh against many ethnic and religious groups in the Middle East seeks to achieve the systematic destruction of the very fabric of the societies of the region, their cultural diversity and their identities. I am referring, of course, to the Christians, including the Orthodox Christians, who are among the most vulnerable, as well as to the Yazidis, whom the High Commissioner of Human Rights has just noted were perhaps subject of genuine genocide. That is truly shocking.

It is urgent that we act quickly and with determination to defeat these monstrous designs. As a member of the international coalition against Daesh, Bulgaria is at the heart of the action to preserve the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional character of the Middle East. While we deplore the loss of life, my

country does not forget that Daesh's barbarism also represents a very serious threat against the historical and cultural heritage of the region, which was one of the cradles of human civilization. In this regard, we noted with great interest the French proposal of including cultural genocide among the crimes subject to international prosecution.

The information regarding the widespread abuses committed by Daesh, including killings, torture, targeted assassinations, abductions, sexual and physical violence, forced conversions and the recruitment of children, are a source of deep concern. Moreover, according to report of the Commission of Inquiry, Daesh may have committed the three most serious international crimes: war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

Bulgaria reiterates its call on the Security Council to refer the cases of crimes against humanity and genocide committed in Iraq and Syria to the International Criminal Court. I recall that last year my country sponsored a draft resolution on Syria before the Council submitted by France. In that regard, my delegation welcomes with great interest and support the idea proposed earlier by Foreign Minister Fabius concerning the formulation of an action plan and road map aimed at preserving the religious, cultural and ethnic diversity of the Middle East. It is high time for us to act as one.

The ongoing violence has triggered a humanitarian crisis of unprecedented scale: the worst humanitarian crisis of our time. Bulgaria has joined international efforts to mitigate the suffering of Syrian refugees in the neighbouring countries and will contribute for the third consecutive year to the activities of the World Food Programme.

Bulgaria fully supports the Secretary-General's initiative to develop an action plan that addresses matters relating to security, social and political inclusiveness, humanitarian assistance, the fight to combat impunity and against discrimination, as well as to preserve the region's ethnic and religious diversity. The implementation of such measures requires a strong commitment from the Security Council and the international community to put an end to Daesh's persecution of individuals belonging to different ethnic and religious groups.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Yoshikawa (Japan) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank you, Sir, for your initiative in convening today's meeting.

(*spoke in English*)

Extremists such as those of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) have been deliberately persecuting ethnic and religious minorities in the Middle East. The convening of today's meeting is therefore opportune and relevant. We need to mobilize against terrorists' attempts to eradicate the diversity of the social fabric of the region.

The victims of violent extremism are not limited to ethnic and religious minorities. Violent extremism has led to the killing of a considerable number of citizens of all backgrounds in the Middle East. At the beginning of this year, Mr. Haruna Yukawa and Mr. Kenji Goto, both Japanese citizens, were also brutally murdered by ISIL. My Government firmly condemns such inhumane and despicable acts of terrorism. ISIL and other extremists reject the rule of law upon which the international community is based. They pose a serious threat to the international community. Faced with such barbaric acts, we must work together to fight against violent extremism. Allow me to present two efforts that Japan has undertaken to that end.

First, Japan supports Middle Eastern countries in building counter-terrorism capacities. To that end, Japan has specifically decided to contribute $15.5 million with a view to enhancing the capacity for investigation and prosecution and border control, as well as strengthening counter-terrorism legislation. Japan is also steadily implementing the Security Council resolutions related to counter-terrorism, while cooperating with partner countries to strengthen international counter-terrorism frameworks.

Secondly, Japan provides assistance in creating societies that are resilient to radicalization. We believe that the best way to nip violence in the bud is to bring stability to people's livelihoods by fostering a middle class, even if it takes time. Our assistance therefore includes a youth employment policy, the improvement of income disparities and assistance for education. Expanding people-to-people exchanges is also part of our cooperation programme. For instance, we supported the establishment of the Egypt-Japan University of Science and Technology in 2010. That institution has been developing human resources that are expected to

play leading roles in achieving economic and social development in the Middle East and Africa.

As a country located in Asia, Japan will continue to strengthen its partnership with the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to promote moderation in the region. Japan will host workshops and seminars on countering radicalization in Asia.

While undertaking efforts to combat violent extremism, Japan will continue to carry forward its diplomacy to promote stability and prosperity in the Middle East. In January, in a policy speech in Cairo, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan underscored the idea that "the best way is in the middle". That ancestral Middle Eastern proverb encourages people to embrace moderation so as to stabilize their livelihoods. In that speech, Prime Minister Abe pledged humanitarian assistance totalling $200 million for the countries fighting against ISIL in the region. That money has already been disbursed. Japan will also continue to contribute to promoting regional cooperation in the Middle East and to stabilizing its societies and economies through economic assistance. Japan's Corridor for Peace and Prosperity initiative in Palestine, starting with its Jericho Agro-Industrial Park project, is part of such efforts.

The international community must stand firm against violent extremism. I would like to reiterate Japan's determination to play an active part in this endeavour.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to pay tribute to your initiative, Sir, in convening this important Security Council debate on the victims of persecution based on their religious or ethnic identity in the Middle East, especially those suffering from the crimes being committed by Daesh and other extremist groups.

Today, the world is facing unprecedented dangers that represent a source of genuine concern and threaten the very existence of modern States, which were founded on the principles of citizenship, coexistence, equality and human rights. Such dangers seek to impose an extremist model based on an outmoded fantasy that relies on ethnic and religious identity as the basis for large-scale persecution. We must adopt firm measures to extirpate the deviant thinking that underlies such attitudes. In order to impose their ideas, those extremists have always sought to separate the world into two separate camps based not solely on people's appearance but on their religious and ethnic identity. They have tried to impose their concepts through nihilistic views, insisting on certain values, such as religious supremacy, a quest for justice and so on.

In opposing extremism, we must exercise prudence and be careful not to attack members of religious groups, because that could unwittingly exacerbate the sense of injustice, intolerance or racism, all of which could serve as an inexhaustible source of fuel for the fires of hatred and intolerance. In that regard, it is unnecessary to recall that the misguided thoughts of certain extremist groups linked to the Islamic religion should not serve as an excuse to attack Muslims or their religion. Such a dangerous tendency, which some have adopted out of ignorance or on the grounds of free expression, only strengthens the idea of religious warfare.

Given its history, Egypt has always sought to foster coexistence among various ethnic groups and religions. We draw on our cultural heritage to counter attempts to transform the open identity of Egypt and impose extremist cultures that are contrary to our thinking. These extremist groups emerged when Egyptian citizens fell victim to the odious crimes committed by Daesh in Libya. We cannot allow their blood to be spilled in vain. I therefore recall that the selective treatment of terrorism and extremism is an unacceptable, calculated error that must be corrected. It will cause the downfall of those who seek to use terrorism to attain their narrow political interests. Very often, those who play with fire burn themselves.

In this respect, although laudable, our efforts to protect our religious minorities in the Middle East, including the Christians, come with certain risks. We must counter extremists and violent terrorism. Accordingly, the classification of victims based on their religion is contrary to the principles of religion and humanity, which give priority to the rule of law, because all human beings are equal. We must remember that the Middle East is the birthplace of Christianity, and Christians are an essential component of the Middle East. They contributed to the appearance of Muslim civilization because they helped enrich it, and no one can deny — unless out of ignorance — that their attachment to the region is firmly anchored in history.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century and the revolution of 1919, Egyptians have been keenly attuned to the meaning of citizenship, because they understand that while religion belongs to God, the nation belongs to everyone. We recall that the preservation of human life is a sacred duty. We will spare no effort to protect the entire Egyptian population from all forms of extremism and terrorism, and we shall seek to ensure that life takes precedence over death and destruction.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Ms. Bird (Australia): I thank you, Sir, for bringing this important issue to the Council's attention today. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner for Human Rights for their insightful briefings, and welcome the Secretary-General's announcement of a United Nations plan of action on preventing violent extremism and his proposal to convene an advisory panel on inter- and intra-sectarian dynamics.

The Middle East has long been the home of great ethnic and religious diversity. A majority of the world's population belong to a creed that has its origin in the Middle East. The peoples of that region have long taken pride — and rightly so — in the mosaic of languages, cultures and confessions that call it home. Through immigration, the Middle East's diversity has enriched Australia, where many of the region's peoples and their descendants have found a home.

Sadly the Middle East's religious diversity is under threat as never before. The emergence of extremist groups like Daesh and Al-Qaida has led to horrific atrocities, forced conversions and the deliberate targeting of those they consider unbelievers. The reckless destruction of antiquities is an assault on thousands of years of heritage. We note with alarm the Human Rights Council's recent report that Daesh may have perpetrated genocide against Iraq's Yazidi community.

Australia is working in support of the Iraqi Government and with other regional partners to confront the threat posed by Daesh. Of great concern, the conflicts in Syria and Iraq have taken on a sectarian dimension. Terrorists have targeted places of worship with shocking consequences, as we saw last week in Yemen. Australia firmly believes that freedom of religion is a core human right. This freedom must be respected in all countries.

Australia stands with the peoples of the region from all religious and ethnic groups, including a great many of those from local majorities, who wish to preserve their rich cultural heritage. We urge Middle Eastern States to fulfil their responsibility to protect ethnic and religious minorities. In resolutions 2139 (2014) and 2165 (2014), the Security Council demanded that the Syrian authorities do so. We ask that the States of the region give particular attention to enabling the protection of women and girls in these vulnerable communities from sexual and gender-based violence. We urge all Member States to look at the role they can play in supporting freedom of religion in the region, including by helping those States burdened by displaced populations and preventing the travel of foreign fighters, many of whom have been responsible for shocking atrocities.

There are, however, positive examples in the region. Jordan has long protected religious minorities, and Lebanon's experience in its civil war shows not only the high toll that conflict between religious communities can exact, but also that, over time, wounds can heal and followers of many religions can again share a proud national identity. It points us to the urgency of a political solution in Syria in which all of Syria's communities can have a voice in that country's future. Diversity, once lost, is hard to regain. All States must do what they can to protect freedoms of religion and respect for ethnic diversity throughout the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Laassel (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): It is my honour to deliver the Kingdom of Morocco's statement on behalf of the Minister Delegate to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Ms. Mbarka Bouaida, who has been detained in Rabat by an urgent matter.

I should like to congratulate France for its initiative and to thank you, Sir, for inviting my country to take part in this meeting on the protection of victims of attacks and abuses on ethnic or religious grounds in the Middle East, an issue that demands the international community's attention and touches the world's conscience.

The atrocities we are seeing today in that region of the world, the cradle of civilizations and monotheistic religions, cannot leave us indifferent, much less allow us to sit idly by as helpless spectators. Indeed, the massacres and other persecutions of minorities and communities, the destruction of places of worship

and monuments that represent a universal heritage of humankind are actions aimed at erasing the collective memory of humankind. These atrocities — which are perpetrated by an entity that claims to be Islamic and from a region that, since the dawn of time, has been a place of peaceful and harmonious coexistence among religions and civilizations — cannot be ignored or tolerated, much less go unpunished.

In responding to your invitation, Sir, the Kingdom of Morocco wishes to express its unflagging commitment to the fight against terrorism and absolute condemnation of the stigmatizing of religious, ethnic and racial minorities in any form and for any reason. However, our unanimous condemnation here is not enough to ease our conscience. There is an urgent need for collective and joint action to put an end to the phenomenon and render justice, and more importantly, to implement strategies to prevent these barbaric crimes by attacking these problems at their root causes.

The world in which we live is in the throes of an unprecedented identity crisis, expressed through a conflation of prejudices and rhetoric inspired by the so-called clash of civilizations. The economic and financial crisis and various situations of instability, complemented by populist ostracism, further exacerbate this tendency to stigmatize the Other and are at the heart of Islamophobic, anti-Semitic, anti-Christian and other current trends.

The question that arises then is whether we want to resign ourselves and accept this false inevitability, or whether instead we want to mobilize ourselves and curb it and promote a pluralistic world that draws its richness from its diversity, where universality finds its true and whole meaning. This is a discussion that we all need to take up head on and turn into a daily fight on all fronts. Political decision-makers, opinion-makers, civil society, mass media and schools need to be at the heart of this war against ignorance and hate speech.

The Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence, adopted in October 2012 in the capital of our Kingdom, represents the conclusion of the work and discussion of a series of workshops on this subject matter and is edifying from a number of standpoints. The Plan of Action is the synthesis of brainstorming and concerted efforts by independent experts and representatives of civil society that have been pursued in various regions of the world. This is a first in the body of international alliances, thereby paving the way for promising, collective, conscious and committed actions to promote tolerance.

Building upon the adoption of the Plan of Action, the city of Fez, the spiritual capital of the Kingdom, will host, on 23 and 24 April, the first forum of religious leaders on the prevention of the incitement to hatred that leads to heinous crimes. This is an invitation to the members of the Council to make that moment a time of alliances against all forms of intolerance perpetrated in the name of what is sacred.

The Kingdom of Morocco, whose identity has been forged throughout the centuries by inputs of various kinds and which has enshrined its confessional, ethnic and racial diversity in its Constitution, intends to contribute and share its modest experience in the management and restructuring of the religious realm that has made it, and still makes it, a land of hospitality, openness, tolerance and harmonious coexistence between all its component parts.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): Mr. President, allow me to begin by expressing my appreciation to you and the French presidency for convening this meeting on the multifaceted challenges that we face in combating violence and extremism in the Middle East and beyond.

The Islamic Republic of Iran strongly condemns the widespread targeting and killing of ethnic and religious minorities by Daesh terrorists and all other extremist groups. We also condemn the destruction of mosques, holy shrines, churches and temples, as well as of artefacts and archeological treasures representing the rich cultural heritage of humanity.

Violent extremism has emerged as an unprecedented composite of narcissistic, dogmatic and violent entities with a global agenda and with the following characteristics. It is a unique global terror network, actively recruiting in as many as 90 countries, all united in pursuing a policy of terror and destruction. They mobilize individuals, add new members, spread their influence and threaten places near and far. As such, this phenomenon is reminiscent of the Arab-Afghans of the

1980s and could be dubbed European-Arabs. Thus, it is indicative of failing to learn from history.

These like-minded extremists have consolidated their networks by sharing terror tactics and romanticizing violence and bloodshed. They continue to use the most advanced social media to reach out to young people and recruit many fighters from all around the world, some starting as tourists and ending up in terrorism. Violent extremists have committed unparalleled brutality as they set fire to houses and schools, enslave the free, oppress the vulnerable and kill the innocent with astonishing cruelty. Beheading, burning and enslaving women and children, shamefully advertised by the groups on social media, all of this exposes the extent of the threat they pose to the global community.

These terrorist groups falsely call themselves Muslims, but they have killed thousands upon thousands of Muslims, which is unprecedented in human history. Killing around 140 innocent Yemeni people in two recent suicide bombings in Sana'a was one of the latest example in their savagery. Acting in a true Takfiri manner, they call whoever is not with them non-believers, condemning them to death. They have established an ever expanding list of enemies, including Shiites, Christians, Yazidis, Kurds, Turkmen, as well as the vast majority of moderate Sunnis, subjecting them to slavery and death.

Until the terrorist and extremist groups are dismantled, these extremists will continue to pose the gravest threat to the world. The international community's inconsistent and incoherent policy and strategy in combating extremist groups has not only fundamentally undermined the effort to confront them, but has also resulted in emboldening them. A genuine commitment by the international community to a serious and comprehensive approach to challenging extremism is imperative. Any failure in this field will doom efforts to rid the region of this malicious force. A comprehensive strategy against Daesh must address the ideological, social, political and economic dimensions of violent extremism.

If there is a genuine resolve to combat extremism, it must be translated into specific and effective actions. It is imperative to adopt a united front, with a clear message and a coordinated strategy. The disruption of financial and logistical support and the sharing of relevant information and intelligence, as well as enforcing effective and coordinated border control, are crucial to the success of such a campaign. The failure to take the necessary actions to disrupt support for terrorists and destroy their networks will only lead to more bloodshed and destruction.

At the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session, the President of Iran called for a world against violence and extremism, which Iran would support in all its aspects. We have been steadfast in our fight against extremism and have in practice demonstrated that Iran will be a true partner in an ardent international fight against extremist groups.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Italy.

Mr. Cardi (Italy) (*spoke in French*): Italy thanks the French presidency of the Security Council for organizing this important debate.

(*spoke in English*)

Italy aligns itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union and wishes to make the following remarks in its national capacity.

The terrorist threats we face seek to divide us by race, ethnicity, nationality, values and religion. The risk is particularly high in the Middle East, where the multiethnic and multireligious character of those societies is under severe threat. As a close friend and neighbour of the region, Italy stresses the importance of preserving the inclusiveness of those societies.

We are actively engaged in projects in favour of ethnic and religious minorities, including Yazidis and Christian denominations, providing health care and psychological support, rebuilding schools, supporting educational and social reintegration and protecting the unique multicultural heritage in Iraq and in the region. We are also active partners in multilateral forums to counter terrorism and violent extremism, and we contribute to the search for the necessary political responses to the crises affecting the Middle East.

Italy strongly condemns the widespread violence and grave abuses of international human rights and humanitarian law committed by Daesh, associated groups and other terrorist organizations targeting individuals belonging to ethnic, religious and other minority groups. We are appalled by the brutal persecution suffered by all of those groups, individuals

and communities, and we recognize that the first victims of Daesh are Muslims.

Let me focus on some specific issues where Italy can provide added value to the debate and to our joint effort. First, in prevention, by promoting dialogue and mutual understanding, especially at the grassroots level, through education and awareness-raising campaigns. Our fight against discrimination on ethnic and religious grounds is first and foremost a cultural initiative that requires long-term efforts to protect younger generations.

In that regard, we have been working with the Office of the Special Advisors on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect on updating the Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes, which strengthens the United Nations early warning capacity by stressing the importance of sectarian violence and religious-based propaganda as warning signs of the risk of atrocity crimes. The post-2015 development agenda can also contribute to our prevention efforts. An agenda promoting sustainable development can tackle the root causes of violence and human rights abuses and promote peaceful and inclusive societies.

Secondly, outreach to all ethnic and religious communities in the Mediterranean and the Middle East is essential. Only by winning back groups and communities that harbour feelings of disenfranchisement, distrust and marginalization will it be possible to seriously affect the recruiting power of Daesh and other extremist groups. Media can also play a key role in promoting dialogue and tolerance, thus countering the narrative proposed by extremists.

Thirdly, reconciliation and inclusion can promote inclusive political processes and tolerance, diversity, intercultural and interreligious dialogue as values and ingredients for the stability of the region.

Fourthly, accountability is critical in fighting impunity and promoting justice. Atrocities committed against individuals of a different religion, belief or ethnic background must not go unpunished. As recent United Nations reports have suggested, such acts carried out in violation of international human rights law could amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity, or even genocide. As Vice President of the Assembly of States Parties to the International Criminal Court, allow me to mention the role played in the fight against those crimes by the Court and by the Security Council in referring such situations to the Court, as well as the need for support and follow-up by the Council to promote more effective prevention through justice.

The last issue is cultural heritage. The deliberate destruction of cultural and religious heritage by Daesh in Syria and Iraq constitutes a war crime, according to international law, and reveals the determination to eradicate all traces of diversity in the region. Italy considers it a priority to stop the destruction, and we support UNESCO's role in that respect. Building on our experience as the first country to create, in 1969, a police force specialized in the protection of cultural heritage and the fight against illegal trafficking in cultural property, Italy is promoting, together with Spain and other partners, a UNESCO draft resolution on culture in areas of conflict. In the light of the strong connection between the preservation of cultural heritage and peaceful coexistence, Italy calls on all States members of UNESCO to join in that effort.

In our capacity as co-lead country of the Counter-ISIL Finance Group of the Counter-ISIL Coalition, we call for the swift implementation of resolution 2199 (2015) to counter the illicit trafficking in cultural property. We also welcome the joint statement on the destruction of cultural heritage proposed by a cross-regional core group composed of Chile, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Italy and Poland and endorsed by 137 countries in the Human Rights Council.

To achieve our common goal, Italy welcomes the Secretary-General's proposal today to draft an action plan with concrete measures. We are ready to cooperate to that end.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Sweden.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I have the honour today to speak on behalf of the Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and my own country, Sweden.

First, I want to thank France for taking the initiative to convene this important debate. I also thank Foreign Minister Fabius and Secretary-General Ban for their remarks earlier today.

The situation in Syria and Iraq today is a human catastrophe with devastating consequences far beyond the Middle East. Violent extremism and religious intolerance are a source of untold suffering. No community escapes that vicious cycle. The majority communities, as well as the minorities, have seen

friends and family killed, immense suffering and destruction of homes, communities and infrastructure.

Efforts must be intensified to stop that mayhem. The war in Syria is now in its fifth year. We urge the Security Council to push for a political solution that can put an end to the conflict. Ethnic and religious minorities are often especially vulnerable and prone to becoming victims of various human rights violations and abuses, for example, targeted mass killings, extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, torture, sexual violence and enslavement — crimes that affect, not least, women and children. Other forms of humiliation include vandalizing places of worship and cemeteries as well as land-grabbing with complete disregard for our common universal heritage. The Nordic countries demand that those responsible for those atrocities — many of which amount to crimes against humanity — be prosecuted.

Recent events in Iraq demonstrate how persons from different religious and ethnic groups have been forcibly expelled from their homes, such as the Yazidis and Christians on the plain of Niniveh in Iraq. Those are, sadly, not unique examples of communities forcibly expelled from their ancient habitats. The hundreds of Assyrians kidnapped in Syria and whose fate remains unknown provide another example of the brutality of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Nobody who does not fit ISIL's worldview is spared, whether they be Christian, Muslim, Yazidi or from other communities.

Aside from the immediate suffering of the affected, the risks of ethno-religious cleansing are evident. A region that was once home to a mosaic of communities — Christian, Jewish, Mandean, Muslim, Yazidi and Zoroastrian — risks being reduced to a political entity of paralyzing uniformity. The ethnic and religious diversity of the Middle East needs to be preserved. In the absence of a political solution, we need to address the humanitarian situation and show solidarity with Syria's neighbours. Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey have shouldered a huge burden. Nordic countries have contributed substantially to the World Bank Multi-Donor Trust Fund for Lebanon and a similar fund for Jordan.

We all must take responsibility for those who flee persecution, atrocities and conflict in search of a safe haven. Since the civil war in Lebanon broke out in 1975, the Nordic countries have received thousands of migrants and refugees from the Middle East. My own country, Sweden, has offered a new home to more than 70,000 Syrians since the outbreak of that conflict. The conflicts in Iraq and Syria need political solutions and highlight the need of inclusive governance. The Nordic countries provide strong support for United Nations Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura in his efforts. Policies must be inclusive and offer political space for all — majority as well as minority populations. Reconciliation efforts are key.

The increasing threat of radicalization in parts of the region makes the need for a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict all the more pressing. As the facts on the ground are rapidly changing, we urgently need to send a clear and convincing message to younger generations that there is an alternative to violence and the status quo. We stress the importance of restarting peace negotiations in order to achieve a comprehensive peace agreement based on a two-State solution.

As the tragic events during the past few years have shown, no part of the world, including the Nordic countries, is free of the ailments of sectarian and gender-based violence. We are all confronted with the challenges of Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of xenophobia. The strongest countermeasure against polarization is inclusive participation. We welcome the intention of the Secretary-General to convene an advisory panel on today's important topic.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Braun (Germany): Given the time, I shall deliver a shortened version of my statement. The complete text is available on our website. As usual, Germany aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union.

By taking the initiative to organize this important debate, France has brought to the Security Council agenda a subject that affects not only the Middle East, but all of us. We stand today against the gross and systematic violations of human rights in the Middle East, the root of which can be found in the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. The objective of the terrorist militia, Daesh, is to establish a totalitarian system. Daesh will not tolerate any model that deviates from the prescibed, uniform way of life of a controlled and homogeneous society. Those who cannot or refuse to comply with that model are threatened, fought, driven out, raped, tortured or killed.

The August 2014 attacks against the Yazidi settlements in the mountains of Sinjar were accompanied by the massacre of civilians, leading to an exodus of epic proportions. Many Yazidi women and children fell into the hands of Daesh and were abducted, enslaved and sold. The commission of inquiry of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has found evidence that the systematic crimes committed against Yazidis by Daesh may amount to genocide. Daesh has also mercilessly attacked Shiites, as demonstrated by the brutal siege that was intended to starve the population of the town of Amerli.

Christian towns and villages of Nineveh have been abandoned. For centuries, Muslims and Christians prayed side by side before the tomb of the prophet Jonah in Mosul; yet that revered symbolic site was set ablaze at the order of terrorist commanders. Neither has Daesh spared Sunnis who refuse to submit to their inhuman ideology. Recently, in the Syrian city of Hasakah, we witnessed the bombings that resulted in the death of dozens of Kurdish New Year party guests, and the horrific massacres of members of the Sunni tribe Albu Nimr in Iraq and the Shaitat tribe in Syria.

Some say that the only viable plan to counter Daesh in the Middle East is the force of a dictatorial State that imposes its version of tolerance. Yet the example of Syria teaches us that the tyranny of a despotic regime not only does not guarantee lasting stability but also does not allow genuine religious tolerance to grow. What a dictatorship achieves is a deafening political silence, a deceptive calm before the storm. Over 220,000 deaths leave no doubt that the Syrian regime is neither protecting its citizens nor guaranteeing any stability; on the contrary, it is threatening and destroying it. That is why our response to the terrorist violence and totalitarian ideology of the Daesh terrorist militia must take the form of mobilization for pluralism, diversity, inclusiveness, participation and human rights. That commitment should enable our partners on the ground to act decisively against Daesh and other terrorist groups, including through the use of military means. Germany is actively involved in the anti-Daesh coalition, including by equipping and training Iraqi security forces to defend themselves against that organization.

At the same time, we are supporting the new Iraqi Government in its efforts to implement reforms that will promote the participation and inclusion of all groups in society. An inclusive political process is also necessary to resolve the conflict in Syria. The generous help received daily by those who have been persecuted, in particular members of minority groups, in their places of refuge in the Middle East, from neighbours, compatriots, as well as complete strangers, is impressive and serves as example to us all. This immense willingness to help contradicts the false image that Daesh seeks to convey to us and extends to all those in need.

That example should guide us all. We must not allow ourselves to be misled by polarizing ideologies. Rather, we must always be guided by the respect for the human rights of every individual. Together we must find ways to help persecuted and displaced persons on the ground, regardless of their ethnic or religious background. Fleeing a country may be a necessity in the event of an imminent danger, when there is no other way out. That is why Germany is a host country; since 2011, Germany has taken in some 100,000 Syrian refugees.

Therefore we must do everything in our power to create the conditions that would provide those suffering from Daesh's reign of terror or the tyranny of the Al-Assad regime, with the realistic possibility of safely returning to their country as soon as possible, a safe, free country where citizens of all ethnic and religious groups are guaranteed participation, and where all human rights are fully respected, regardless of one's political conviction, gender or sexual orientation. We also need to work together to protect the cultural heritage of those countries, which is our common heritage. The richness of the Middle East lies in the diversity of its peoples and traditions. It is the cradle of Christianity, which, like Judaism and Islam, is an integral part of the Middle East. We must preserve that richness together.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I will not comment on what has been said by the colleague who just took the floor; I will, however, comment on similar statements. Despite the fact that the crisis in my country has entered its fifth year, the minarets of mosques and bells of churches still call out for peace and love in the cradle of civilizations and religions that is Syria.

The former director of the Louvre museum, André Parrot, called Syria the homeland of civilized men.

For thousands of years Syria has woven, on its pure soil, a diverse social fabric threaded through with love, mutual respect, brotherhood and coexistence in a manner unparalleled in human history. The main objective of the plot against Syria is to tear that fabric and divide the country into city states and entities that can then be devoured by the viruses of ethnic and sectarian affiliations. That fabric, with all the warp and woof of its national character, has thwarted all such designs against Syria, although the terrorists, who have no principles, spare no effort to undermine the country. This is terrorism of an unprecedented nature, which has emerged and thrives with the help of certain Member States, some of which are members of the Security Council. Those States are known by all. They take pride in publicly training, arming and financing the armed terrorist groups, be they Daesh, the Nusra Front, the Jihadis of the Free Army or the so-called armed moderate opposition.

The crisis has once again proven that there are no minorities in Syria, but rather national and socially coherent segments who oppose anyone who targets them. They refuse to be tampered with, whatever their names, their minority affiliation or the divisive denomination they belonged to prior to the formation of the modern State. Some try to distort the tolerant image of Islam through brutal terrorist organizations such as Daesh or seek to create imaginary fronts. The only purpose of such acts is to buttress Israel's objective of establishing a racially distinct State for the Jews on Palestinian land. Those ethnicities lived in peace for decades, even centuries, jointly facing their common enemies.

Whoever is keen, in deed and not simply in words, to protect those segments of Syrian society must first and foremost deal with the root causes of the problem of the terrorism that has been targeting all Syrians for over four years now. That must be done through the serious implementation of all Council resolutions on combating terrorism, in particular resolutions 2170 (2014), 2178 (2014) and 2199 (2015). It is not possible for some States to continue to hold meetings and deliver statements about protecting certain segments of society in Syria, Egypt and other countries while they simultaneously support those who engage in terrorism. Those who continue to finance, arm and train the terrorists are their partners and are thus responsible for the suffering of the Syrian people. They cannot be part of any effort to alleviate our suffering as long as they continue such practices.

In addition to trying to contain the terrorists' activities, we must combat and eliminate radical thinking in the region, in particular the Wahhabi Takfiri thinking. There are specific Governments, in particular those of Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey, who sponsor and propagate that lethal, cancerous thinking. They attempt to export that exclusionist thinking, which is alien to our tolerant society. Anyone who thinks that Daesh, Jabhat Al-Nusra and other terrorist organizations emerged out of the blue is blind. There have been precursors to that emergence, in particular Zionism, ignorant fatwas and the radical educational curricula that are employed to carry out their sinister political agenda in Syria and other States. That runs counter to international law, the relevant Security Council resolutions and the most basic values of civilization and humankind. In addition, we should not allow those terrorist organizations to transmit their poisonous rhetoric and recruit people through social networks. That option could be denied them, provided those supporting terrorism have the moral will to do so.

In conclusion, I would like to comment on the content of some statements by permanent members of the Council. It seems difficult for them to understand the situation, let alone distinguish between the terrorism that they themselves are supporting with a view to undermining legitimate Governments, on the one hand, and the gargantuan efforts deployed by those legitimate Governments, including my country's Government, to protect the people from their own Arab Spring and their own terrorism, on the other.

I would like to draw the attention of Member States to the fact that the so-called moderate armed opposition, which was trained in Israel and Jordan, invaded Bosra al-Sham, the historic Roman World Heritage Site, and targeted one of the segments of the Syrian people, as has happened in other parts of Syria and Iraq. That is glaring proof that Daesh and the Nusra Front are allied with Israel and its partners inside and outside the region.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): We appreciate the presence of your Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. President, today in the Council for the deliberations on this vital issue. We have heard the statements of the Secretary-

General and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights with great interest.

The recent escalation of violence and terrorism against religious and ethnic groups in the Middle East is an affront to humanity and all civilized norms. We endorse the calls for relief and redress for the victims of these atrocities, who have suffered grievously from religious and ethnic bigotry and extremism. Throughout history, millions have been killed, tortured, maimed and dispossessed by the venom of religious and racial hatred. Violence and atrocities against minorities and other vulnerable groups must be unequivocally condemned.

What is deeply offensive and unacceptable is that some vested interests attempt to blame our great faith, Islam, as the source of the current chaos, rather than recall its historical and political roots. The current chaos in the Middle East contrasts sharply with the history and ethos of Islam. The Middle East, as many speakers before me have pointed out, is a cradle of major religions and civilizations. Islamic history in the region is replete with examples of what true Islam preaches: love, brotherhood, tolerance and humanity. Over the course of history, the rights of minorities have been preserved and prosperity promoted when effective authority and order have combined with an enlightened governance of nations, empires or States. The weak — minorities, women and children — have suffered the worst excesses whenever order and justice have collapsed.

It is now clear that disorder and the collapse of State authority across North Africa and the Middle East have transformed the Arab Spring into a brutal winter. The partial or complete breakdown of State authority in Iraq and Syria has allowed for the rise of violent groups such as Daesh, which are inured to extremist ideologies and radical agendas. The quest for power by cynical and brutal leaders wrapped in religious cloaks is not surprising under the circumstances. What is surprising and alarming is the fatal attraction that some of those groups hold for disaffected and alienated youth within and outside the Middle East.

Military and police action can deal with the symptoms of the phenomena, but not the disease. That requires a more comprehensive approach, one that offers a path for the constructive involvement and engagement of young people in the economic, social and political life of their societies and States. Most importantly, it requires an effective and thoughtful response to the narrative of many of these extremist groups, a narrative that they cynically seek to deploy. That narrative is that Muslims have been historically oppressed and can regain their rights and freedoms only through violent means. The narrative will not be neutralized by solemn declarations alone. It can be credibly countered only through genuine efforts to resolve the underlying political problems, among them, a solution for the Palestine issue and other conflicts raging across the Levant and beyond.

Historical and recent experience has demonstrated that the challenges posed by the current chaos in the Middle East will not be overcome by foreign intervention. The sovereignty and territorial integrity of countries will have to be fully respected. Ultimately, durable peace can be restored through national reconciliation in each affected State and can be encouraged and promoted with regional and global support. The Security Council can contribute to restoring peace and defeating the extremist and violent groups by helping to develop a global consensus on the principles and structure for the solution to the challenges confronted in Iraq, Syria, Yemen and, most importantly, in Palestine. To achieve that, the Council must adhere to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and its own unimplemented resolutions.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Thailand.

Mr. Plasai (Thailand) (*spoke in French*): Thailand appreciates France's initiative to convene this timely debate, as we are shocked and alarmed by the growing number of brutal attacks in recent months and of abuses of people simply because they belong to different ethnic groups, religions, faiths or civilizations. I wish to thank the Secretary-General, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Patriarch Sako and Mrs. Vian Dakhil for their valuable and insightful briefings.

During the past six or more decades, chronic conflicts in the Middle East have claimed too many lives and deprived peoples of their right to live in dignity. That horrific situation is now exacerbated by the increasing, widespread and systematic persecution of innocent people based on ethnic groups or religious grounds. In the process, many historical and cultural objects and sites have also been destroyed. Nothing can justify such acts.

Peace can prevail only when the principles of human rights and justice are fully observed. Thailand strongly supports the rights-based approach to intercultural and interreligious dialogue. We believe that all religions and faiths can coexist peacefully because, in essence, they are based on common values, in particular, love, kindness and compassion. It is therefore possible and desirable to promote and strengthen understanding, mutual respect and tolerance among people of different religions and faiths, and thus to bridge any gap that might exist. Solely in that way can we ensure harmonious and inclusive societies based on cultural diversity, freedom of religion or belief, equality and human dignity.

From that perspective, we strongly believe that the international community must take concerted measures to promote the peaceful coexistence of cultures, religions, beliefs and faiths and to stop terrorism and violent extremism. Together, we must send a strong message to the effect that disrespect for or intolerance of religious, cultural or ethnic differences, no matter what the motivations are, must end. The necessary steps must also be taken to ensure that those who perpetrate brutal and deliberate persecutions of people based on such disrespect and intolerance must be held accountable for their acts.

Diversity among cultures, ethnic groups, religions and civilizations constitutes a blessing and the common heritage of humankind. The Middle East is endowed with the beauty of diversity, which should be inherited by the next generation. The international community must not turn a blind eye to the ongoing brutality in the Middle East. We must take effective action together and now.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Belgium.

Ms. Frankinet (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Sir, for organizing this debate on a major challenge of the twenty-first century. Belgium endorses the statement given on behalf of the European Union and wishes to add to it in order to complete its own statement.

The Security Council has had several opportunities to address the situations in Syria and in Iraq and the countless victims of conflicts in the Middle East, mostly Muslims of various denominations. In the past century, the proportion of Christians in the East, a faith that once held a secular presence in the region, has fallen from 30 per cent to 5 per cent of the total population. The emergence of radical Islamist groups, of which Daesh is the most reprehensible, has dramatically accelerated that trend and has radicalized it to the point of horror in their desire to eradicate, physically, culturally and historically, anyone who is not like them. Whether Christian, Yazidi or others, minorities pay an enormously high toll.

That global ideology, both radical and dehumanized, and the threat to the world that it creates, recall the worst period of twentieth-century European history. With an awareness of the horrors committed and that global threat, Belgium decided in the summer of 2014 to actively participate in the political and military coalition against Daesh. We cannot fall into the traps set for us by those radical groups.

The first trap is to believe that we are facing a clash of civilizations or a new religious war. That trap is the primary objective of those radical groups. Based on it, they draw their strength and increase their capacity to mobilize. What we are dealing with is their exploitation of religion to gain power. If we are to fight against and escape that trap, we must make every effort necessary to ensure that our citizens do not fall prey to such rhetoric.

The second trap is to believe that we must choose between the brutality of repressive military regimes and that of radical Islamic regimes. They are, however, the best of enemies and feed off each other. Yet other options, so often defended by the United Nations and my country, are open to us. We must ensure that we promote inclusive democracies, the rule of law and equitable economic development. We must also ensure that public authorities protect all their citizens, ensure respect for human rights and ensure the freedoms of expression, religion and belief. Those are the best weapons at our disposal. We must strongly promote all of them, given our political responsibility to our peoples and to our international commitments. If we are to tackle those threats, concrete actions must be taken without delay. I should like to highlight three of them.

First, we must bring to life our values within our societies, especially among young people. Belgium, serving as President of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, will organize a conference on 8 May on the theme "Tolerance is stronger than hatred", which will show how the diversity of our societies is an asset rather than a liability. My country, which also has its own share of foreign combatants, has been

developing a new strategy to prevent radicalization, and we are committed to working at the national, regional and international levels towards that goal. Cooperation with the other countries concerned will be essential.

The second action is to tackle impunity. There can be no lasting peace in the region if this condition is not met. Daesh's actions are tantamount to crimes against humanity, if not genocide. The international community must pay special attention to the need to bring to justice those responsible for crimes, regardless of who they may be. To that end, we support the work of the United Nations Commission of Inquiry and call on all countries of the region, Iraq in particular, to accede as soon as possible to the Rome Statute. The Security Council can also play a key role by referring the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court.

Thirdly and lastly, we must ensure that persecuted minorities can eventually return to their homes. While at present humanitarian assistance and the efforts of some countries to host them are the only realistic responses, their rightful place is in their own homes. Given the seriousness of the conflicts and their duration, the road ahead will no doubt be rough.

The countries of origin, assisted by the international community, will have to find creative means to rebuild the bridges between the various components of their societies. To that end, Belgium encourages the new Iraqi Government to continue its efforts towards greater inclusiveness . The new European Union strategy on Syria and Iraq, which Belgium fully endorses, can certainly help in this regard.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Mminele (South Africa): At the outset, let me congratulate you, Mr. President, for ably steering the work of the Security Council for the month of March and for hosting this important debate.

In the same breath, I wish to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Hussein, and other briefers for their insightful and informative briefings.

Today's debate takes place against the backdrop of a world that in recent months has witnessed deplorable systematic persecutions of individuals belonging to different ethnic, religious or other minority groups. Like the rest of the world, South Africa has been appalled by the cold-blooded public execution of religious and ethnic minorities throughout the region. We are dismayed by the report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights of 13 March, and again today, that it appears that the Islamic State in Iraq and Sham (ISIS) may have committed war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

ISIS's threat of violence against ethnic and religious minorities and the rape of women and girls, who are often captured as sex slaves, are deplorable, as are the forced conversions and the forced recruitment of child soldiers. It is our collective duty as States Members of the United Nations to reject all forms of intolerance and its manifestations, regardless of where they occur. Our own country's history has taught us that racial, religious and ethnic intolerance is immoral. It is therefore imperative that the international community reaffirm the rights of the individuals who are suffering persecution to live in peace in their countries.

As we move towards the seventieth anniversary of the Organization, which was built on the ashes of the most devastating war and the most horrific crimes against humanity, we are obliged to uphold and enforce the principles of the Charter and to reaffirm the fundamental human rights of all humankind. We should also be particularly firm in focusing on the eradication of the root causes of all forms of intolerance and find ways of addressing fundamental ideologies that create hatred.

South Africa comes from a past that is defined by racial discrimination and racial intolerance. Chapter 2 of our Constitution states that everyone has the right to freedom of religion, belief and opinion. Section 9 of the Constitution prohibits unfair discrimination on various grounds, including religion. Section 39 protects the right of persons belonging to a religious community to practice their religion in peace, and Sections 185 and 186 provide for the promotion and protection of the rights of cultural, religious and linguistic communities. South Africa believes that these principles are sacred, and will continue to promote them in all of our engagements.

South Africa is also of the view that in addressing terrorism, it is important to focus on its fundamental causes. There is a need to understand and address the conditions that make terrorism an attractive option to the disaffected and to develop appropriate strategies to address them. In that regard, concerted efforts must

be made to resolve conflicts in all parts of the world, including the Middle East.

In conclusion, South Africa would like to reaffirm its commitment to working with the international community in our collective quest to fully eradicate all forms of intolerance.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Switzerland.

Mr. Zehnder (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Switzerland would like to thank the French presidency of the Security Council for having organized this open debate. The diversity of the social, ethnic and religious fabric of the Middle East must be defended against all forms of identity-based aggression.

Switzerland would like to raise five points.

First, my country condemns in the strongest possible terms the human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law committed by Government armed forces and non-State armed groups in the Middle East and elsewhere. It is extremely concerned about the credible allegations made by the Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights that the self-proclaimed Islamic State and other extremist groups may have committed war crimes, crimes against humanity and the crime of genocide. The murder of children, women and men and the immense suffering inflicted on the civilian population are unacceptable.

Secondly, Switzerland calls on all parties to armed conflicts to meet their obligations under international law and to respect humanitarian principles. Humanitarian assistance must benefit the persons affected, without any discrimination. The measures taken as part of the struggle against terrorism should not criminalize humanitarian aid or any contacts established with non-State armed groups for humanitarian purposes.

Thirdly, Switzerland condemns all human rights violations, whoever the perpetrators may be, and calls on all actors to stop the violence. We would point out that respect for and the protection of human rights is the primary responsibility of States. Counter-terrorism efforts cannot justify any weakening of the measures aimed at ensuring the protection of and respect for human rights and the rule of law.

In all conflicts and unstable situations, members of vulnerable groups, including religious and ethnic minorities, run a greater risk of suffering human rights violations.

Fourthly, Switzerland stresses the importance of accountability, nationally and internationally, for all violations and abuses committed against civilians and for attacks against cultural property and places of worship. We emphasize the need to prosecute such crimes at the national level and encourage all States to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. In accordance with the principle of complementarity, we invite the Security Council to consider referring the situation in Iraq to the Court. We reiterate our call for the situation in Syria also to be referred. We deem regrettable the rejection of the draft resolution submitted to the Security Council in that respect and will pursue our efforts in this area.

The prevention of violent extremism is one of Switzerland's priorities in its efforts to promote peace and combat terrorism. In addition to participating in global security efforts in this field, we are committed to promoting alternatives for young people who might be tempted to join extremist groups, in particular by strengthening efforts to build the capacities of at-risk societies. For that reason, Switzerland supports the work of the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund, which seeks to implement a long-term strategy to create jobs and therefore future prospects, so as to make all forms of extremism appear less attractive. Such preventive engagement is also clearly encouraged by resolution 2178 (2014).

The Security Council has a key role to play in combating extremism and protecting civilian populations and minorities in times of conflict. Switzerland therefore welcomes the efforts and unity of the Council in facing the escalation of extremism.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Colombia.

Ms. Mejía Vélez (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to thank you, Mr. President, and your country for convening this important debate. We listened closely to the statements made this morning by the Secretary-General, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and His Beatitude and to the moving words of parliamentarian Dahkil.

Colombia would like to join its voice with those of many previous speakers today, for in the face of barbaric acts that show complete disregard for the values of the human condition we cannot be silent. The seriousness of the violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in the areas affected by the presence of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), and the groups associated with it require us to speak with one voice and commit to protecting the values and principles shared by humankind. The people and Government of Colombia offer their sincere condolences to the families and Governments of the victims of this terrorist group. There were Colombian nationals among the victims of the recent attack on the Bardo Museum in Tunis, so we share the pain of those who have suffered at the hands of terrorist groups. Their murder shows that terrorism affects us all. The case of Boko Haram is another manifestation of this serious problem, and we firmly condemn that terrorist group's abduction of women and children and its murder of thousands of innocent people.

As the reports of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and its investigative mission on human rights in Syria show, violence and the persecution of minorities and ethnic or religious groups are one of the manifestations of ISIL's recurring violations of human rights, such as the beheading of Coptic Christians in Libya, the persecution, murder and forced displacement of Yazidis in Iraq and the abduction of hundreds of Assyrian Christians in Syria. They are just a few of the examples that indicate the existence of repeated attempts to exterminate ethnic and religious minorities and groups, which, as the High Commissioner said, could constitute genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes. As many have said before me, we cannot resort to facile categorizations or identify a particular religion or culture with violent extremism, terrorism or genocide. These are unacceptable acts on the part of individuals and groups, not cultures or religions per se.

We must consider the effectiveness of the mechanisms we have to combat these situations of human barbarity, and we must recognize that we are dealing with an enemy that shocks us with its lack of boundaries. We have seen acts and deeds that we did not imagine were possible in the twenty-first century, and we wonder how well prepared we are to combat them. The Secretary-General and the High Commissioner have made specific proposals that deserve our consideration and analysis.

We are concerned by the fact that we seem unable to respond together. We must put aside the divisions that create obstacles to the international community's ability to take concrete action together. Consistency between discussion and action is crucial to responding to barbarism, and we must show ourselves capable of overcoming our differences, since terrorists can exploit them to their advantage. The basis of our action should be ensuring that the legitimate interests of the various sectors of the population are served. We should therefore identify the areas we must work on with States where such acts have occurred in order to make progress with investigations, ensure that the situation will continue to be monitored and that we will work to build societies that are inclusive and that respect diversity, and in which the rights of all citizens are respected and guaranteed without discrimination.

Finally, we cannot forget that in the short term there is an urgent need for response to the dire humanitarian situation. Millions of refugees and displaced persons need help, and while the international community's response has been generous, the magnitude of the situation requires a sustained, flexible and timely commitment.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Greece.

Mrs. Boura (Greece): I would like to thank the French presidency of the Security Council for taking the initiative to convene this timely and important debate. I also wish to thank the Secretary-General for his statement and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for his comprehensive presentation.

Greece aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union. We would also like to speak from our national point of view to emphasize our concern about the unprecedented humanitarian crisis, the impact on minorities and ethnic and religious communities of the protracted conflicts in Syria and Iraq, and the horrendous crimes committed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and other terrorist groups. As those groups display, in the most brutal way, their determination to erode every trace of civilization in the region, we are witnessing heinous persecutions, violence, mass killings and the deliberate destruction of the historical and cultural heritage of ethnic and religious communities.

Christian, Yazidi, Kurdish, Shabak and other Muslim communities that have coexisted for centuries are now being displaced or forced to flee, while many others have been kidnapped and executed. Women and children in ethnic communities have been targeted by violent extremists through abductions, hostage-taking, rape, human trafficking and slavery, despite numerous calls internationally for an immediate end to all sexual and gender-based violence. Today we have heard dramatic messages and testimonies about the torture and suffering of Yazidis, Chaldeans and members of other Christian communities who have been forced to flee their homes. It is noteworthy that half of Iraq's 1.4 million Christians have already left their ancestral land, while 400,000 Yezidis have been violently persecuted and displaced. In Syria, ISIL and other terrorist groups have perpetrated all sorts of abuses and inhuman acts against Christians, while at the same time Muslim communities and citizens have also been the victims of vicious and barbaric abuse.

Greece supports the efforts of the Secretary-General and those of the United Nations through its resolutions, as well as the relevant European Union statements and action, and we condemn the human rights violations and acts of barbarism perpetrated against religious and ethnic groups and the denial of their right to remain in their homeland. We condemn the deliberate destruction and looting of cultural heritage assets such as monuments, museums, churches and religious shrines and sites. Along with our firm stance in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism, we believe we should consider arrangements for closely monitoring the situation of religious and ethnic communities, as a first step to preventing their persecution and oppression in the region. The situation of religious and ethnic groups can serve as an indicator for measuring the overall political environment in the Middle East.

Efforts to achieve peace in the region and prevent violence from spilling over into neighbouring countries will require a regional consensus on supporting the historical presence of these communities in their homeland. In that spirit, the efforts of religious institutions, including the ancient Churches, and of civil society, to promote reconciliation and moderation in the region and preserve peaceful coexistence for all religious and ethnic communities, merit our attention and support. In that context, Greece has undertaken an initiative to convene an international conference with the aim of contributing to addressing the issue in a comprehensive way.

On the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of the United Nations, and as we celebrate the fundamental values and principles of the Organization, we should make it our duty to prevent the loss of diversity and of the invaluable cultural heritage of the Middle East, part of which dates back in time to the very origins of our civilization.

The President (*spoke in French*): I call on the representative of the United Arab Emirates.

Mrs. Nusseibeh (United Arab Emirates): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for presiding over this important debate. I would also like to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and High Commissioner Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein for their remarks and for their efforts to promote and protect human rights, which is at the heart of the issue before us.

Today the international community has come together in the Security Council to discuss the situation of persecuted religious and ethnic minorities in the Middle East. In doing so, we are also sending a message to all citizens of the world that we stand by their inalienable human rights — whatever their religion or ethnicity and wherever they may be. But we must also recognize that today in our region the terrible acts that have brought us here are being perpetrated through the cynical exploitation of religious and ethnic differences by extremists to further their brutal and violent aims. This is not a new, nor a regional phenomenon; extremists throughout history and across the world have manipulated differences to achieve their agendas.

As many of today's speakers have affirmed, the current crisis is not representative of the region's history. Yet, a generation of children are growing up in a world where there is a widespread perception that discord is the natural state of being in the Middle East. They do not know or believe that the region was once a vast interwoven mosaic of communities characterized by different faiths, tribes and ethnicities living in harmony side by side. And I fear that as civil wars rage and violent extremism persists in the Middle East, an even darker perception will prevail that our region is hopelessly divided and that Islam is an inherently intolerant religion.

That is simply not true. Islam recognizes and honours the great faiths that preceded it. Throughout

our history, religious minorities have been protected in Muslim communities from those who sought to harm them because of their beliefs. The same broad tolerance that gave refuge to the Jews who were expelled with Muslims from their homes in parts of Europe in the fifteenth century also protected the adherents of other religions, not only people of the Jewish and Christian faiths, but also Yazidis, Samaritans, Mandeans, Druze and Alawites. In historic Alexandria and Damascus, the great cosmopolitan capitals of the region, all could freely practice their faith and govern their own communities, coexisting peacefully alongside Islam.

That peaceful coexistence was perhaps best exemplified in the holy city of Jerusalem at the apex of its history. While Jerusalem has often been the focus of stories of division and conflict among people of different religions, all are united in their reverence for that holy ground. That is why the General Assembly last year adopted resolution 69/24, which reiterated that the international community has "a legitimate interest in the question of the City of Jerusalem and in the protection of the unique spiritual, religious and cultural dimensions of the city". The great civilizations, religions and peoples of the world are part of Jerusalem's rich history, and it cannot be allowed to turn into the next theatre of conflict. Jerusalem is a symbol not only of our shared history of spiritual coexistence, but also a shining beacon of hope that peace and tolerance can be achieved in the holy land once again.

It is against that rich tide of history that Daesh has emerged today to commit unspeakable atrocities against defenceless people in Iraq, Libya and Syria. Their ambitions extend even further, beyond the boundaries of those countries, threatening to engulf the entire region in their totalitarian and Takfiri worldview, as was so eloquently described by the High Commissioner this morning. Their behaviour — the brutal persecution and systematic attempts to erase any trace of cultural diversity in the name of Islam — is the antithesis of our region's proud past. Attempts by Daesh to justify murder and mayhem through the language of our religion should be seen for what they are: the desperate lies of a demented few. As long as Daesh continues to survive, all communities are under threat. Violent extremism knows no boundaries.

Yet, the rich cultural tapestry of the Middle East, which we hold dear, does not have to be relegated to antiquity. It is possible today. I know this because it exists in the United Arab Emirates. More than 200 different nationalities live and work and worship in their own faiths freely in the United Arab Emirates. And, while our infrastructure is modern, the values of tolerance, moderation and unity that are the foundation of our country's multi-ethnic, multi-religious diversity are ancient.

Fostering such a model requires a conception of State-building that is underpinned by educational opportunity, economic development and the respect for human rights, the rule of law and the prominent role of women as partners in these endeavours. In the United Arab Emirates, we have also found that visionary leadership and strong institutions are the pillars of stability. It is vital to sustain those pillars in the many countries undergoing transition in our region. Our lives and faiths have always been and will always remain interconnected in our region. That is why we cannot isolate ourselves from injustice when it occurs around us. In Egypt, whose stability the United Arab Emirates believes to be the cornerstone of the stability of entire region, as well as Iraq and Syria and Yemen, our long history of harmony is threatened by the actions of extremists.

Underlying the shifting landscape in the Arab scene, the ongoing injustice of the Palestinian question fuels the narrative of Daesh's recruitment efforts, both in our region and globally. An end to that tragic conflict must be achieved, and we commend France's leading diplomatic efforts to secure a meaningful resolution of that tragic injustice. In our region, but elsewhere too, it is vital to shore up the economic, social, legal and institutional infrastructures of States. They provide the framework of critical protections for people when societies break down, and they deliver the means to prevent and stop violence and disorder, even when leadership fails. That must be our focus as we shape the broad ambitions of the post-2015 development agenda.

In that context, the United Arab Emirates would like to offer some recommendations for addressing the problem. First, the Security Council must consistently condemn the systematic persecution of minorities wherever it takes place. And in finding solutions, we must respect the Charter of the United Nations, the paramount document of common principles that we have as an international community. Member States must have the courage to do what is right and not only what is politically convenient. The United Nations can, however, only fulfil its mandate if it is empowered to do so by its membership.

Secondly, it is imperative to consult and listen closely to the States of the affected region itself. We understand the issues and the context, and we will bear the consequences in the long term.

Thirdly, the impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators must be addressed through the formation of resolute international coalitions. Secure and stable societies are the cornerstone of good governance, and we must help our region to stabilize during this turbulent period.

Fourthly, Governments must be encouraged to extend their protections to all their citizens and uphold their freedoms.

Fifthly, strong institutions and mechanisms that protect human rights and provide early warning to prevent and respond to violations must be built and maintained.

The responsibility for implementing those recommendations nationally and supporting them internationally lies with all of us, if we wish to continue to emulate the model of the human values of tolerance, moderation and diversity that began with our forebears.

Let me end by congratulating the delegation of France on the successful stewardship of the Security Council during its presidency across a broad range of issues that are fundamental to international peace and security.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor the representative of Slovenia.

Mr. Marn (Slovenia): I would like to join other delegations in commending the French presidency for its organization of today's important and urgent debate.

Slovenia aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union.

Violent extremism, religious and ethnic hatred and intolerance have gained ground in recent months, in particular in the Middle East. We therefore share the concerns of the international community regarding the widespread and systematic human rights violations and persecutions by Daesh and other terrorist groups and organizations. We are appalled by the misuse of religion to fuel provocation, confrontation, religious hatred and extremism. The victims of violence come from many different ethnic, religious and minority groups, as stated by the majority of speakers today. As the recent report (A/HRC/28/18) of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on actions of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant has shown, the grave human rights violations committed by ISIL and associated groups have included killings, torture, rape, sexual slavery, forced conversions and the conscription of children.

Many women and girls belonging to various religious minorities have been the victims of rape, torture, sexual enslavement and forced marriages with Daesh fighters. They have also been subjected to forced conversion and other cruelties. The violence and atrocities committed by Daesh have triggered massive displacements of people in Iraq in Syria. The extent and nature of those crimes may already be seen as crimes against humanity, war crimes, ethnic cleansing or even genocide.

The international community must find a way to end impunity for these crimes. In that regard, we would like to underline the crucial role of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in fighting impunity. We call on all States in the region to accede to the Rome Statute. The ICC also has an important preventive role, as the launching of investigations could have an impact on perpetrators or criminal groups. It is essential that the Security Council refer the situation to the ICC.

We are also very concerned about the growing number of incidents where Daesh has intentionally destroyed important religious, cultural and historical sites, such as archaeological sites, places of worship, churches, mosques and shrines belonging to different ethnic and religious groups and minorities in Iraq and Syria. We have to do our outmost to preserve the rich and ancient diversity of the cultures and religions that have existed in the Middle East for over 2,000 years.

In formulating our response to the tragic events resulting from international terrorism we should keep in mind that we are dealing with a multifaceted and fluid phenomenon that should not be directly associated with any religion, race or belief. We should avoid generalizations and the creation of stereotypes with respect to particular ethnic or religious groups, as they often lead to a vicious circle of intolerance and hatred. Civil society and the media have an important role to play in such endeavours.

In addition, our response should not take a solely repressive approach, as the conditions conducive to the spread of violent extremism, radicalism and terrorism need to be analysed and addressed comprehensively with a view to tackling the root

causes of radicalization. We should also work towards fostering a culture of respect and religious diversity, particularly among the young. Our response should also include humanitarian assistance to those fleeing their homes in fear of terrorist groups and to those surviving atrocities. Slovenia provides humanitarian assistance in a continuous manner, following the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, independence and efficiency. We are focusing particularly on medical rehabilitation and psychosocial assistance to children who have been the victims of armed conflicts.

Slovenia would like the United Nations to be better equipped and able to properly counter attacks and abuses made on ethnic or religious grounds. We welcome the Secretary-General's proposal to convene an advisory panel of respected women and men and prepare a plan of action aimed at preventing violent extremism, but the plan of action should focus on situations worldwide, not only in the Middle East. The current need to efficiently tackle such threats may give a new impulse for exploring ways to finalize the draft of the United Nations Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism, which would include a definition of terrorism.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Portugal.

Mr. Mendonça e Moura (Portugal): Manifestations of religious-based intolerance and violence are increasing in many regions of the world. Violent incidents targeting individuals, communities and sites on the grounds of ethnicity, religion or belief are occurring in increasing numbers in various countries. This situation is exacerbated in situations of armed conflict, where persons belonging to minority groups often disproportionately suffer the effects of hostilities and are particularly vulnerable to displacement through population relocations and forced migration. They often form a considerable part of the refugee flows.

It is a global scourge. No region is free from that phenomenon, but the widespread and systematic violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the Middle East, a region with very diverse ethnic and religious groups, is of particular concern. We must act together and promptly in order to tackle it.

We are appalled at the increasing violations of international humanitarian law and serious human-rights abuses, including mass killings, extrajudicial and summary executions, the deliberate targeting of civilians, mass expulsions, forced conversions and other forms of the targeted persecution of individuals on the basis of their religion, belief or ethnicity. The attacks against the Yazidi community in Iraq, the abduction and killing of Christians in Syria, the beheading of Coptic Christians in Libya, the deliberate targeting by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) of ethnic and religious communities, such as Sunni Muslims, Christians, Yazidis, Shabaks and other groups in Syria, are some of the unspeakable examples that demand a collective and urgent action from all of us. Tactics to foment terror and fear are also being used by ISIS and other extremist groups to exert control over communities by vandalizing and destroying what is most sacred — places of worship and religious and cultural heritage sites.

Human rights violations by States can contribute to radicalization and recruitment. Hatred and violence towards ethnic or religious communities do not occur without the prior stigmatization and dehumanization of targeted groups and the incitement to hate. It is the result of a social, cultural, economic and political legacy that usually finds expression in discriminatory policies and practices of exclusion and marginalization, State repression, endemic corruption, lack of trust in public institutions, a culture of impunity and the denial of human rights and the tenets of international humanitarian law.

It is the obligation of States to ensure that persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities

> "may exercise fully and effectively all their human rights and fundamental freedoms without any discrimination and in full equality before the law",

as proclaimed in the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. Furthermore, States have the responsibility to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, and from incitements to commit such acts. Human-rights abuses are the first signal of alert that genocide and crimes against humanity may follow. The international community should hold States and non-State armed groups to account and make them aware of their existing obligations under international law, including human-rights, humanitarian, criminal and refugee law.

Overcoming a culture of impunity must be a priority. Those who commit or are complicit in acts of violence must be brought to justice. Portugal believes that the International Criminal Court should continue to play a fundamental role in deterrence, complementary to the role played by courts at the national level, by holding perpetrators accountable and by investigating and prosecuting those responsible for committing atrocities against civilian populations.

Addressing the threat posed by non-State armed extremist groups and terrorists calls for a comprehensive approach to the underlying causal factors, including by engaging in an effective communication strategy to prevent the evolution from radicalization to terrorism, to suppress the flow of foreign fighters, but most of all to promote political and religious tolerance, economic development, and social cohesion and inclusiveness. We obviously welcome the proposal announced by the Secretary-General this morning to establish a panel of experts to draw up guidelines to better tackle violent extremism.

Long-term stability in the Middle East requires respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as tackling the root causes of extremist ideologies derived from ethnic and religious discrimination and exclusion. Concerted action, including through interreligious dialogue initiatives, on the part of all relevant stakeholders — States, religious communities, civil society organizations, media representatives, and so on — is crucial in that regard. The promotion and protection of the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities contributes to political and social stability and peace and enriches the cultural diversity and heritage of a society. States must promote a culture of tolerance, inter alia, through education, in particular human-rights education. Accordingly, respect for pluralism can only become a reality when social, economic and political inclusion and cohesion in societies occurs.

The right to the freedoms of thought, conscience, religion or belief is a fundamental right of every human being. As a universal human right, the freedom of religion or belief safeguards the respect for diversity, and its free exercise directly contributes to democracy, development, the rule of law, peace and stability. We must strive to promote and protect those rights in line with the core values enshrined in all key international human-rights instruments adopted by this Organization.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Romania.

Mrs. Miculescu (Romania) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by thanking the French presidency of the Security Council for having convened this debate. Romania associates itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union, but I would like to add some remarks in my national capacity, which I will keep brief in the interests of time.

The world is looking on in horror at the massacres, beheadings, arson, rape, stonings, conversions at gunpoint, the revival of slavery, mass expulsions and forced migration being perpetrated against Christians, Yazidis and Shia Muslims, including Shabaks, Turkmens and others.

The strategy of the criminal gangs responsible, such as the so-called Islamic State or Daesh, is simple, as their beliefs exemplify barbarity. By destroying the rich religious heritage and ethnic diversity that make up the complex social fabric in the Middle East, as well as the remains of a glorious past, they aim to totally subjugate and manipulate all people within their reach. Their actions are part of a campaign to erase diversity, and it is being conducted in the name of Islam, with which those savages have absolutely nothing in common.

Let us not forget the victims of the barbaric attempts to hunt and potentially eradicate entire religious communities from their historical lands. The tragedy of the Yazidis is perhaps the largest-scale tragedy that any one community has suffered since the emergence of Daesh.

Christians have been a part of Syria since the conversion of the Apostle Paul on the road to old Damascus. The central role of Arab Christians in the development of Arab civilization and culture, leading to the Al-Nahda Arab renaissance of the nineteenth century should not be ignored. Nevertheless, today the very survival of Christianity in the Middle East is in danger. Due to the limited time available, we can only recall a few of the collective tragedies, such as the violent expulsion of thousands of Armenian Christians from the coastal town of Kessab one year ago, or the recent cowardly murders, this time in Libya, of 21 Egyptians of the Coptic Christian faith.

We must urgently step up efforts aimed at preserving the mosaic of religious and ethnic communities that have enriched the Middle East for centuries. The

international community must do more to reverse the trend in the region towards expelling or exterminating people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds, who are all under the terrible threat of an extremism that is guided by narrow-mindedness and blind violence. We encourage the United Nations to expand its activities in that connection, primarily by raising awareness around the world of such tragedies as the fate of undesired minorities, including through tools that already exist, such as the Alliance of Civilizations.

I would like to express the support of Romania for the initiative of the Secretary-General to prepare an action plan to be prepared by a panel of religious leaders, as well as for France's announced plan to convene a conference on the topic.

Faced with the imminent danger of sectarianism, tolerance and inter-religious dialogue must be encouraged and strengthened robustly by secular and religious representatives — prerequisites for creating and ensuring a peaceful environment based on mutual respect. Such messages must also reach the younger generations in war-torn areas, which are unfortunately expanding, as the daily horrors evidence. Young people must be gently turned away from the effects of the culture of violence and reminded of the values of tolerance and understanding that have enabled millennia of coexistence in our shared space for the benefit of all.

We would like to see more discussion on this topic, at the national level in the countries affected, as well as at the international level. The aim should be that discrimination based on religion or ethnicity should be not only prohibited in law but also clearly understood as such by the majority of society. We must build on the fact that the vast majority of Muslims denounce extremist ideology and are themselves terrified by the atrocities committed by such groups. But societies, in particular in the countries affected, must speak openly about how terrorism exploits the universal impulse of young people to seek opportunity and justice, in contrast to the marginalization, discrimination and corruption they witnesses on a daily basis.

Meeting the economic and social grievances of those people is the key issue. We must focus strongly on education, especially in post-conflict situations and in areas liberated from terrorism, so as to prevent further atrocities in the future and to enable persons belonging to ethnic and religious minorities to resume their places in their societies and in their territories.

In conclusion, let me recall the words of the legendary Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjöld, who once said that the United Nations had not been created to bring humanity to heaven, but to save humanity from hell. To do so and to save the minorities under threat in the Middle East from hell, we must follow our consciences and show determination in stepping up our efforts to that end, especially taking into account the very complex and specific proposals made during today's very important debate.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Ukraine.

Mr. Tsymbaliuk (Ukraine): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Sir, for having convened this important and timely open debate, which reresents a valuable contribution to the common efforts of the international community to address violent extremism, religious and ethnic hatred, and intolerance in the Middle East.

Ukraine fully supports the position of the Security Council that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security and that all acts of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable regardless of their motivations, or of where or by whom committed. Ukraine supports the provisions of the latest Security Council resolutions concerning threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts, in particular resolution 2199 (2015), adopted on 12 February and devoted to the activities of terrorist organizations such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

Ukraine remains committed to achieving lasting peace, stability and security in Syria, Iraq and the broader region, as well as to countering the ISIL threat. We share the idea that an inclusive political transition in Syria and inclusive political governance in Iraq are crucial to sustainable peace and stability in the region. In that respect, Ukraine is deeply concerned about ISIL and other associated terrorist entities and the negative impact of their presence, violent extremist ideology and actions on the stability of Iraq, Syria and the entire region, including the devastating humanitarian impact on the civilian populations, which has led to the displacement of millions of people. The acts of violence

being committed by ISIL foment sectarian tensions and are extremely alarming.

We strongly condemn the widespread and systematic persecution of minorities in the Middle East on ethnic or religious ground and the indiscriminate attacks, atrocities, killings and human-rights abuses being perpetrated by ISIL and other terrorist groups, in particular against Christians and other religious and ethnic groups.Ukraine also expresses its deep concern regarding the destruction of the cultural heritage in Iraq and Syria, in particular by ISIL, including the targeted destruction of religious sites and objects. We support the Security Council decision that all Member States shall take appropriate steps to prevent the trade in Iraqi and Syrian cultural property and other items of archaeological, historical, cultural, and rare scientific and religious importance.

Ukraine supports the Security Council in condemning the abduction of women and children, their exploitation and abuse, which have been committed by ISIL and other associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities. All such activities must be stopped by all possible measures. This issue should remain on the Security Council agenda and receive the Council's due attention.

In its Foreign Ministry statement of 16 September 2014, Ukraine welcomed the outcome of the International Conference on Peace and Security in Iraq, held on 15 September 2014 in Paris. We expressed our support concerning the efforts of the new Iraqi Government aimed at strengthening the rule of law, at ensuring inclusiveness for all political forces within the federal institutions of power, and at fighting without compromise manifestations of terror.

Ukraine, which is involved in a decisive fight of its own against foreign-backed terrorists on its territory and faces direct external aggression, shares the view that the terrorist group ISIL is a threat not only to Iraq and Syria, but also to the entire international community. Ukraine supports all efforts aimed at combating terrorism, unconditionally, regardless of where or in what form it occurs.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Poland.

Mr. Winid (Poland): Let me thank you, Sir, for convening today's debate. Poland aligns itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union. However, I would like to add a few comments in my national capacity.

Poland attaches great importance to the protection of the human rights of individuals belonging to religious and ethnic minorities. We have quite a long tradition of tolerance and interreligious dialogue. Let me just mention one document: the declaration of the Confederation of Warsaw of 1573, which granted the freedom of religion to all the citizens of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. It was the first legal act of that kind adopted in Europe.

My Government is gravely concerned by the current violence against ethnic and religious groups in the Middle East. Poland contributes to the aid delivered to members of persecuted minorities by the United Nations and European Union agencies. We have also taken unilateral actions, as in August last year when we sent over eight tons of assistance to Christians in Northern Iraq in reaction to their dramatic situation and the persecution they were facing. We are very grateful to the authorities in Erbil for helping us with that project.

Unfortunately, every day brings new horrors to the people in the Middle East and North Africa. All religious and ethnic groups have been suffering from unprecedented violence, including Christians, Shias, Sunnis, Yazidis, Kurds and others. The widespread violence affects everyone from Iraq to Libya and, recently, Tunisia. I condemn, in the strongest terms, the horrific act of terror in Tunis, in which three Polish nationals lost their lives, among over 20 other people.

Every day we also witness other chapters of the barbaric destruction of the cultural heritage of the Middle East perpetrated by the so-called Islamic State and other extremists groups. I would like to mention one event that is extremely sad for Poland. Last year, the Al-Nusrah Front ruthlessly demolished the fourth-century Church of Saint Sergius and Bacchus in Malula, near Damascus. The attack destroyed two icons presented to that church in 1943 by General Wladyslaw Anders, commander of the Polish army, who shortly before had escaped the inferno of Stalinist Siberia. The Polish army was on its way to Monte Cassino to fight there for the freedom of Poland and the liberation of Italy. Today, the church is burned, the paintings destroyed.

We cannot underestimate such actions. Their ultimate goal is not only to intimidate the unfaithful,

but to change the social and ethnic composition of the region forever. The history of the twentieth century teaches us about the need to take action in the face of such developments to prevent even larger-scale atrocities.

It is now more than five years since the beginning of the war in Syria, and we urge the Security Council to live up to the obligations that the Charter of the United Nations imposed on this body, and finally to take the necessary actions that can help put an end to the conflict in that country. The situations in Iraq and Libya also requires concrete actions by the Council. Further inaction will only fuel extremism and deepen the suffering of millions of people across the Middle East. It will also enable the spillover of the sectarian violence across the region and globally. After all the acts of terror that have taken place in recent months, we should all be well aware that no country is safe from the threat of extremism. It is in our common interest to respond adequately to these challenges.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Luxembourg.

Mr. Maes (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank France for organizing this open debate on a topic of concern to all of us. I also want to thank the speakers who bore witness today to the violence that minorities are suffering in the Middle East. Luxembourg fully supports the statement made by the observer of the European Union.

All forms of extremism represent a blinding of thought. It can only survive when cut off from the real world and shielded by ignorance. Extremism does not tolerate either difference or diversity; it abhors culture and knowledge. Everything that differs from it threatens its very existence. Shocking as it may seem, the brutality that Daesh is demonstrating in Iraq and Syria against minorities and ethnic or religious groups is not surprising. Those minorities and groups represent the religious, ethnic and cultural plurality that is so characteristic of the Middle East. By the very fact of their existence, they are a challenge to the nihilistic and totalitarian ideology of Daesh.

In its destructive madness, Daesh attacks men, women and children of all minorities, be they Christian, Yazidi, Kurdish or Turkmen. Its will to annihilate all trace of those communities leads Daesh to also attack the sanctuaries and cultural heritage of the Shiites, the Christians and even the Sunnis. As the concept note before us (S/2014/176, annex) rightly indicates, this is an attempt to systematically destroy the diversity of the social fabric in the regions concerned.

The recent report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation of human rights in Iraq (A/HRC/28/18) concludes that the acts committed by Daesh there against minorities are akin to war crimes, crimes against humanity and acts of genocide. Those findings echo those of the ninth report recently issued by the International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/28/69). Women and children of minorities are particularly affected. Their life has no value for the Daesh fighters; it is simply a means of exchange. Boys are recruited and indoctrinated before being used in the conflict. Women and girls, especially Yazidis, are seen as the spoils of war and are raped and offered as sex slaves to Daesh fighters.

We vehemently condemn all the atrocities that Daesh and other parties to the conflict have committed. In that context, we support the idea that the United Nations should draft an action plan to protect minorities in the Middle East with all the tools at its disposal. Luxembourg is prepared to provide its support, particularly in the humanitarian field.

The rise of Daesh in the Middle East cannot be separated from the regional political context. Daesh has fed on the brutal repression committed by the Al-Assad regime against its own people in Syria and on sectarian tensions in Iraq. Countering Daesh therefore also means seeking a political solution to the multiple crises that affect the region and the socioeconomic challenges facing the people. That is all the more urgent because there is a real risk of the spread of the scourge of extremism.

In adopting resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2104) and 2191 (2014) last year, the objective of the Security Council was to work to significantly improve the humanitarian and human rights situation in Syria. If the solution to the conflict in Syria can only be political, that does not release the parties, primarily the Syrian authorities, from their responsibilities in terms of protecting civilians. The Security Council must act to ensure full compliance with resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014), as well as with resolutions aimed at countering the terrorist threat in the region, particularly resolutions 2170 (2014) and 2178 (2014).

Over the long term, it is by doing justice that we will best respond to injustice. It is by righting the wrongs against the innocent that the victims will be rehabilitated in their dignity. That is why Luxembourg continues to call for the Security Council to refer the situation that has prevailed in Syria since March 2011 to the International Criminal Court (ICC). That is also why we encourage Iraq to accede to the Rome Statute of the ICC, or at least make a statement recognizing the Court's jurisdiction. Those who today threaten the very existence of the minorities that are the mosaic of the Middle East should know that justice will eventually catch up with them.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Eler (Turkey): For centuries, the Middle East has been the cradle of peaceful coexistence for different communities. People of the Middle East lived side by side, considering their differences to be a richness. Today we are witnessing a dramatically different atmosphere, and we all need to try to understand the root causes of this situation.

Sectarian policies and brutal responses to the legitimate demands for democracy in the region have been coupled with feelings of resentment due to the growing discrimination, xenophobia and Islamophobia in other parts of the world. This has created a poisonous mixture that has eroded the culture of tolerance and the social fabric of the region and has acquired dimensions that affect global security.

We should be clear on two facts: first, terrorism and extremism are not a Middle Eastern phenomenon. Terrorism cannot and should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilization or ethnic group.

Secondly, as violence and terrorism have no religion, we should not treat their victims differently or selectively based on their identity, nationality or religion. Even though the majority of the victims of violence and persecution in the Middle East are Muslim, our empathy, solidarity and efforts of protection should encompass all.

With this understanding, let me briefly touch upon some particular situations.

The conflict in Syria has just entered its fifth year.

The situation has gone from bad to worse and become a threat to global peace and security. That said, I will not take up the Council's time by responding to one delegation's renewed baseless allegations, which we categorically reject.

The focus of most of the interventions today was the shocking persecutions and abductions committed by Daesh. The brutality of its actions should not lead to any illusions about the conditions that have caused the emergence of this terrorist organization. The regime brutally suppressed the legitimate demands of Syrians and, in an attempt to prolong its grip on power, continues to employ all kinds of instruments, including chemical weapons and barrel bombs, and to commit mass violations of human rights.

Nor should Daesh's appalling actions mislead us about our priorities on the way forward. The international community and the Security Council need to address the root cause of the problem in Syria through resolute action. A genuine political transition in accordance with the Geneva communiqué is the only solution in that regard.

In Iraq, Shiite and Sunni Muslim communities were among the first to be persecuted by Daesh. These persecutions, which targeted all segments of Iraqi society, have forced 2.2 million civilians to flee their homes. We support the Iraqi Government with respect to the challenge it faces. We have so far provided 750 truckloads of humanitarian aid to Iraq for all Iraqis, including Sunnis, Shiites, Turkomans and Christians. In response to the aid appeals made by the governorate of Mosul and the Kurdish regional Government of Iraq, they were delivered to populations in need in Mosul, Telafer and Sinjar, in addition to the aid channelled to the central regions of Iraq affected by the ongoing crisis.

We have also built three camps in northern Iraq for internally displaced persons, with a total capacity of 37,500. We are in the process of building a fourth camp in Kirkuk in coordination with the local authorities. These efforts will continue. Last but not least, we have opened our doors to the victims. Almost 200,000 Iraqis, including Christians and 20,000 Yazidis, have sought refuge in Turkey.

This figure is in addition to the over 1.7 million Syrians whom we are hosting without any regard for their ethnic or religious background.

In the framework of this important open debate, we cannot ignore the plight of the Palestinians who

are living under occupation. They are deprived of their basic rights and are subject to discrimination. We need to keep in mind that the historical injustice against the Palestinian people is fuelling hatred, alienation and radicalism. The resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on the two-State vision would not only enable the Palestinians to enjoy their basic rights and freedoms, but also constitute a key step towards tackling instability and radicalism in the region.

In today's world, no region or community is immune to violence and persecution. We are witnessing a global phenomenon, and we need to address it through global cooperation. Our common struggle against discrimination, intolerance, racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia is more relevant than ever.

With this understanding, we co-launched the Alliance of Civilizations initiative in 2005. We have insistently argued that our commonalities outweigh our differences and that fostering intercultural understanding can help create an environment of mutual respect.

The fundamental rights and freedoms of the peoples in the Middle East can be secured by eliminating the conditions that provide a fertile environment for Daesh and other terrorist groups. Political, democratic and inclusive solutions to the multiple crises in the region will be essential in this regard.

Despite all of the difficulties, we believe that the peoples of the Middle East will succeed in their efforts to revitalize their deep-rooted culture of tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

Lastly, in relation to the remarks made by the Deputy Foreign Minister of Armenia, let me make the following points, which were also highlighted in the messages by President Erdoğan and Prime Minister Davutoğlu in April 2014 and last January, respectively.

Turkey shares the suffering of the Armenians and is endeavouring, with patience and resolve, to re-establish empathy between the two peoples. It is indisputable that the last years of the Ottoman Empire were a difficult period, full of suffering for Turkish, Armenian, Kurdish, Arab and millions of other Ottoman citizens, regardless of their religion or ethnic origin. It is the duty of humankind to acknowledge that the Armenians remember the suffering experienced during that period, just like every citizen of the Ottoman Empire.

However, we disagree as to the portrayal of events as genocide. The narratives of the parties do not as yet converge. What we need to do is forge a shared and just memory. In that regard, let me once again stress that our desire to share in the pain, to heal the wounds and to re-establish friendship is sincere. Our course is set towards a horizon of friendship and peace.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Netherlands.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): The Kingdom of the Netherlands aligns itself with the statement made earlier by the European Union (EU).

I will read out a short version of my statement. My full text will be available via my Twitter account in view of time constraints.

First of all, I would like to thank France for organizing this very important open debate on this very urgent issue, which directs our attention to the violent extremism, intolerance, religious and ethnic hatred that have gained ground in recent months, in particular in the Middle East. The Kingdom of the Netherlands, as a partner for peace, justice and development, applauds the inclusive nature of this debate.

I will make three points: on human rights, on the actions my Kingdom has taken, and on accountability.

On human rights, every individual must have the freedom to express his or her identity. This includes the right to have any religion, the right to change religion or to have no religion at all. Human rights, in our view, apply to all. To exclude any person belonging to a particular group would undermine the universality of our common human rights.

My Government is therefore deeply worried about the deteriorating security situation in the Middle East. The brutality of the crimes committed by extremist groups in the region is unparalleled in recent history. The future of the multi-ethnic and religious landscape of the Middle East is under imminent threat.

My second point concerns the actions taken by my Government.

We are committed in our fight against violent extremism in the region. As a member of the international coalition against the Islamic State in Iraq and Sham (ISIS), we have contributed 250 military personnel and six F-16 aircraft. Furthermore, we have

deployed 130 Dutch military trainers to train local coalition forces to fight these extremist groups.

Furthermore, the Kingdom of the Netherlands co-chairs the Foreign Terrorist Fighters Working Group within the anti-ISIS coalition. Of course, we also provide humanitarian assistance to countries facing the challenge of hundreds of thousands of refugees as a result of this violence. To the Syrian crisis alone, my Kingdom has contributed more than €114 million since 2012, and at the Kuwait pledging conference next week my country will further step up its efforts to contribute to humanitarian assistance in the region. We hope other States will do the same.

The international community has a collective responsibility to protect civilian populations from international crimes. That holds especially true for vulnerable groups in society, like ethnic and religious minorities. My Government urges the permanent members of the Security Council to agree to refrain from the use of their veto in situations where civilians are threatened with mass atrocity crimes. We salute the initiative to that effect of the Government of France.

My third point centres on accountability. Military action is not enough. Efforts must be made to strengthen the rule of law and to build inclusive societies. Furthermore, we need justice. The perpetrators of those heinous crimes need to be held accountable. Justice and accountability should be included in the political process from the start. Impunity would simply create a new breeding ground for new violent extremism. National capacities to deal with justice and accountability must be strengthened as part of the transition and post-transition process. If accountability cannot be achieved domestically, the Netherlands calls on the Council to request the International Criminal Court in the Hague to play its role as a court of last resort.

In conclusion, the future of the multi-ethnic and religious landscape of the region is under threat. This needs a firm collective response from us, the States Members of the United Nations. The principles of the United Nations Charter are at stake. The Kingdom of the Netherlands, as a partner for peace, justice and development, will continue to contribute to that firm response.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Croatia.

Mr. Drobnjak (Croatia): I would like to thank France for convening this important meeting, which has provided us with many constructive and valuable proposals. We hope that today's debate will help to further mobilize the international community against the actions of Daesh and other terrorist groups in the Middle East.

Croatia aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union. However, I would like to make some additional remarks in my national capacity.

Let me start by expressing our grave concern over the situation of Christian, Yazidi and other religious and ethnic communities in the Middle East, especially in Iraq and Syria, whose very existence and survival is seriously threatened. We have seen horrific acts of violence and unspeakable barbarism committed in the name of religion by Daesh and associated groups against individuals belonging to disfavoured religious and other minorities. We strongly deplore those actions as well as the destruction of precious religious and cultural heritage. The actions of Daesh constitute serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, and may constitute a crime against humanity and genocide, for which there must be accountability. In that regard, we believe that the role of the International Criminal Court in the fight against impunity is indispensable.

We highly commend the efforts of the United Nations and other international organizations and non-governmental organizations, in raising awareness of, documenting and reporting violence and crimes against minority communities in the region. We believe that more concerted efforts are needed to combat all forms of religious fundamentalism and manipulation of religious beliefs for terrorist purposes. In that context, we fully support the initiative to prepare a comprehensive action plan on preventing violent extremism and to create a panel of experts, as announced today by the Secretary-General. We believe that the action plan should encompass security aspects, humanitarian actions, sociopolitical inclusivity, the fight against impunity, the fight against discrimination, and the preservation of ethnic and religious diversity.

It is of vital importance to protect and preserve lives and the tradition of intercultural, interethnic and interreligious coexistence in the region. Those centuries-old traditions are treasures of mankind: various religious minorities in the region are part of

our common human heritage. Judaism, Christianity and Islam were all born in the Middle East, are inextricably linked to one another, and have a long celebrated tradition of coexistence. The situation in the Middle East is very complex, but it is important to keep the focus of the international community not only on security issues, but also on the suffering of religious and other minority groups. We cannot ignore the fact that Christians in the Middle East are increasingly being targeted by Islamist fundamentalists, and that the Christian population of the Middle East has decreased dramatically and continues to do so.

Croatia supported the Joint Declaration Supporting the Human Rights of Christians and Other Communities, particularly in the Middle East, issued at the twenty-eighth session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva on 13 March. It was the first time that the plight of Christians was specifically addressed by the Human Rights Council. It has to be stated clearly that Islam cannot be used as an ideological excuse for violence against Christian and other minorities, or any other religion for that matter. Aziz Hasanovic, mufti of the Islamic community in Croatia, has said recently that the terrorists who use Islam as an excuse are harming and abusing their religion. They betray the faith, the essence of which is love, dialogue, coexistence and offering assistance to people in need. Hatred and exclusivity of any kind have no place in Islam. Therefore we should all, regardless of our faith and beliefs, unite our efforts to fight against those who distort and abuse any religion as justification for their terrorist acts. We all have to work together for the sake of peace and respect for the dignity and rights of every single person, and the values of diversity and peaceful coexistence.

Let me conclude by reiterating our strong support and solidarity with the persecuted religious and ethnic minorities of the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in French*): First, I would like to congratulate you on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

I would also like to thank you for convening this meeting on the victims of attacks and abuses based on ethnic or religious affiliation in the Middle East. I would also like to thank Mr. Laurent Fabius, Minister of Foreign Affairs of France, specifically, for attending and presiding over this meeting.

The Middle East is experiencing a period of unprecedented chaos and difficulty. Islam is facing attack from two fronts, both from within and without. Within, extremist groups cloaked falsely in religious garb, such as Daesh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, Al-Qaida, Hizbullah and others, are carrying out the worst forms of killing and persecution, the primary victims of which are large numbers of Muslims. The flames of those acts are reaching many members of other communities.

From without, Islam is confronting a provocative and inflammatory media campaign that includes violence against Muslims in some parts of Europe, Myanmar, Palestine and other places. That campaign also includes practices that, though not violent, are no less harmful. Those practices include the distortion and disrespect of Islamic holy and religious sites and figures, such as the publication of caricatures that are offensive to the Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him. Therefore, we would have wished that the perspective of this meeting had taken all of those items into consideration and did not limit itself to the question of attacks and abuses on minorities in the Middle East, despite the importance of that subject.

If we were to look more broadly at this topic and try to understand its historical dimensions, we would realize that Islam is a religion of tolerance and openness. It is a religion that does not distinguish or discriminate among religions. God says in his noble book, *The Koran*, that the messenger, the Prophet, believed in what was revealed to him from his Lord, and have the faithful have done likewise ever since. All of them have believed in Allah, His angels, His books and His messengers, saying that we must make no distinction among any of his messengers.

Islam requires all its adherents to be rightful and just to others, as God All Mighty says:

> "God does not forbid you to deal justly and kindly with those who have not fought against you on account of religion and have not driven you out of your homes, and does not forbid you from being righteous towards them and acting justly towards them."

This religion does not consider its followers' faith complete unless also they believe in the message of Jesus, Moses and other prophets of God. Islam is a religion that recognizes religious freedom. As God Almighty says, "There is no compunction in religion".

Islam is the religion that has looked after religious minorities throughout the centuries, including Christians in Palestine and Jews in Andalusia and others. Therefore, what the persecution of religious minorities in the Middle East today is a clear and grave violation of the law of the noble religion of Islam. The hateful exploitation and distortion of Islam and its principles are also often used to justify the oppression and marginalization suffered by Muslims themselves, whether at the hands of oppressive and unjust regimes, such as the Syrian regime, which has killed hundreds of thousands of Syrians and has displaced millions of them regardless of their faith, ethnicity or sectarian beliefs, or at the hands of Israel, which continues to persecute the Palestinian people, Muslims and Christians alike, and to practice the most heinous forms of killing and ethnic cleansing against them.

Combating violence and attacks against religious minorities in the Middle East and everywhere else in the world must be based on two main pillars. The first is the fight against all forms of terrorism and the isolation of its supporters; the second is the restoration of rights and the principles of international justice and the rule of law among and within States. The Middle East, which suffers from violence and attacks on minorities, requires and needs from the Council a profound remedy and solution to its political problems, first among which is the acknowledgement of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and the enablement of Palestine to exercise its legitimate right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent State within the borders of 4 June 1967, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif, noble Jerusalem, as its capital. It also requires reaching a political solution for the plight of the Syrian people, based on the Geneva Declaration, which calls for the establishment of a fully empowered executive authority that would lead the Syrian people towards the realization of its aspirations in justice, freedom and prosperity. It is also important to prevent extremist forces, such as Hizbullah and the Houthis, from enforcing their political will over other groups through the use of armed force. It is important to combat terrorism everywhere, without hesitation and with all possible means.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia recognizes and understands the importance of dialogue with the followers of other faiths and cultures. Therefore, in cooperation with the Kingdom of Spain and the Republic of Austria and with the participation of the Vatican, we have established the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue in Vienna to foster dialogue and understanding among the various religions and communities. We have also sponsored and continue to sponsor channels of dialogue within the various communities of Islam. We have combatted terrorism through participation in the coalition that is confronting Daesh in the north of our region and the Houthis in the south. We have participated in the establishment of the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, under the auspices of the United Nations. We have launched our peace initiative for Palestine. When the bands of Daesh overwhelmed large tracts of territory in Iraq, we rushed to provide assistance to our brothers in that country, and contributed $500 million to assist those who were harmed by the terrorist attack, regardless of the religious, communal or ethnic identity of the victims.

Thus, my country continues to combat those who oppress and persecute minorities, while at the same time, it continues to try to reach political and cultural solutions so as to promote understanding, coexistence and dialogue. That is our path; that is what we call for with wisdom and good practices.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Slovakia.

Mr. Ružička (Slovakia): At the outset, Slovakia aligns itself with the statement presented earlier on behalf of the European Union. I would also like to thank the French presidency for taking the initiative in organizing this important debate.

Before I narrow my statement to focus on the victims of attacks and abuses on religious and ethnic grounds in the region of the Middle East, I would like to point out the following reasons for the brutality of the radical groups Daesh and Boko Haram. The victims of those attacks were disgracefully killed by individuals — it is very difficult to call them human beings — motivated by pure hatred. The victims were abused and tortured, and they suffered in a way that none of us here is probably able to imagine.

Terrorism and extremism are often linked with religion, but that is wrong; it is a mistake. There may

be other links to a combination of many elements, like globalization, migration and social problems, lack of education, desperation or the lack of decent perspectives for one's life. Slovakia rejects all racial or religious intolerance, radicalism and extremism, as well as the linking of terrorism to religion. Hostilities targeting civilians — members of different religious communities and minorities — are a serious offense against basic human rights. Nor should we speak about the clash of civilizations. It is a clash of humanity versus brutality, which is often based on personal or group destructive hatred against society, other groups or individuals.

The Middle East region, religion and ethnicity are the subjects of today's debate, and not incidentally. The region has given birth to some of the most important world religions. That unique diversity faces an existential threat from the so-called Islamic State and from Al-Qaida and affiliated terrorist groups, which disrupt the lives of all the communities in the region. Millions of people have been either displaced or forced to leave their ancestral lands. Those who stay in conflict zones or areas controlled by terrorist groups live under the permanent threat of human-rights violations, repression and abuses. Terrorist groups target anyone and everyone. There is no escape from their hatred. Muslims, Christians, Jews, Yazidis, the elderly, men, women, children — terror knows no difference there and no boundaries. Unfortunately, so far, the terrorists know only one thing; there is almost complete impunity for the crimes they have already committed.

Religious and ethnic fanaticism is a danger that may exist in any religion or belief. Slovakia is of the opinion that it is the duty of the international community, Governments, religious institutions and all relevant stakeholders to speak out promptly, clearly and loudly against any acts of violence committed in the name of religion. We must take all necessary actions in order to combat extremism and incitement to hatred more effectively.

Terrorism represents one of the gravest threats not only to the Middle East but also to us in Europe and the whole world. In the fight against terrorism, the world stands on the same side and only joint efforts will lead to the desired results. The international community has a duty to assist in building the capacity of States to fulfil their commitments to the responsibility to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. The international community should hold States and non-State armed groups to account and make them aware of the existing tools and instruments under international law, including punitive ones, that must be used to protect human rights. The community must apply humanitarian, criminal and refugee law.

Slovakia is ready to support any action in that regard. Once again, I call upon the international community to take action immediately, because, as we speak, victims of abuse continue to suffer. Hatred, fuelled by desperation and false interpretations of religious beliefs, can be easily implemented against a tortured soul, especially of a child. Any hesitation to take an active step increases numbers of those who may be misled by some who intentionally rupture ideals of good faith and seed hatred among people.

To conclude, it is the rich unprecedented Middle East history which has brought Muslims, Christians and Jews to live in the same cities. Diversity is the fortune of the region and we must not let it become the reason of its decline.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the observer State of the Holy See.

Archbishop Auza (Holy See) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of His Holiness Pope Francis, I greatly thank the French presidency for convening this debate on the victims of attacks and abuses on ethnic or religious grounds in the Middle East.

(*spoke in English*)

The debate is not only timely, but also most urgent, especially when calling to mind those who have already lost their lives, for whom this open debate has come too late. Their fate urges us to do all that we can to prevent further victims of attacks and abuses based on ethnic and, or, religious grounds. Christians and other religious minorities of the Middle East seek to be heard by the Council and other international forums, not in some abstract form, but in a manner that is truly conscious of their pain and suffering and their existential fear for survival in the Middle East and elsewhere.

We must acknowledge that the problem exists and that the hour is grave. Ethnic and religious communities — including Turkmen, Shabak, Yazidi, Sabaean, Kaka'e, Feyli Kurd, Shiite Arab and even Sunni Arab and Kurd — face extreme pressure, abuse of their human rights, torture, killing and all forms of

persecution, purely due to the faith they profess or the ethnic group to which they belong.

The Christians in the Middle East have been specifically targeted, killed or forced to flee their homes and countries. We have helplessly watched as Assyrian Christians have been kidnapped in Iraq by the so-called Islamic State group, Egyptian Coptic Christians have been beheaded by organizations affiliated with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant in Libya, and the Christians in Mosul have been nearly eliminated. Only 25 years ago, there were 2 million Christians living in Iraq, while the most recent estimates are less than a quarter of that figure.

Faced with the unbearable situation of living in a conflict zone controlled by terrorist and extremist organizations that constantly threaten them with death, and with a deep sense of feeling abandoned to their fate by the legitimate authorities and the international community, entire communities of Christians, especially from northern Iraq, have been brutally forced to flee their homes and have sought refuge in the Kurdistan region of Iraq and in the neighbouring countries of the region.

The Holy See expresses profound gratitude to countries and leaders in the region that have openly defend the Christians as an integral part of the religious, historical and cultural fabric of the region. For 2,000 years, Christians have called the Middle East home; indeed, as we know, the Middle East is the cradle of Christianity. Thus, it pains us deeply that the ancient Christian communities in the region — many of which still speak Aramaic, the language of Jesus Christ — are among those threatened with extinction. Their uninterrupted existence in the region is testimony to many centuries of coexistence, side by side, with Muslims and other religious and ethnic communities.

Those communities are an integral part of the cultural and religious identity of the Middle East, thus their disappearance from there would not only be a religious tragedy, but the loss of a rich cultural and religious patrimony that contributes so much to the societies to which they belong and which the whole world has much interest in preserving. The Holy See therefore calls on all of the leaders and people of goodwill in the region and throughout the world to act before it is too late.

In 2005 at the World Summit, the entire international community agreed that every State has the primary responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing and related incitement. Moreover, the international community recognizes its responsibility to assist States in fulfilling their primary responsibility. However, when a State is unable or unwilling to uphold that primary responsibility, the international community must be prepared to take action to protect populations in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.

As Pope Benedict XVI underlined in his address to the General Assembly in 2008 (see A/62/PV.95), the responsibility to protect is not a novel creation in international law, but rather is rooted in the ancient *ius gentium* — the law of peoples — as the foundation of every action taken by those in Government with regard to the governed. Building on that ancient tradition and its reiterations in international humanitarian law and in today's United Nations forums, Pope Francis has repeatedly called upon the international community to do all that it can to stop and to prevent further systematic violence against ethnic and religious minorities.

The Holy See avails itself of this opportunity to convey its deep appreciation to the countries in the region and to all those who work tirelessly, even risking their lives, to provide assistance to some 2.5 million internally displaced persons in Iraq, to 12 million Syrians in need of humanitarian assistance, of whom 4 million are living as refugees and 7.5 million are internally displaced. Let us help these neighbourly countries as they care for and welcome the refugees. Delayed action will mean only that more people will die, or be displaced or persecuted. Pope Francis exhorts us all to join our efforts to support a Middle East that will continue to be a welcoming home for all of its ethnic and religious groups.

The President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Ireland.

Mr. Mawe (Ireland): I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing today's debate on this important subject. Ireland aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier on behalf of the European Union and its member States. I would also, at the outset, like to thank the speakers who have provided here first-hand testimony of the persecution they have suffered for their beliefs.

Ireland's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Charles Flanagan, in his address to the General Assembly last

September (see A/69/PV.18), condemned all forms of persecution or discrimination based on religion or belief and specifically highlighted the persecution of religious minorities in the Middle East, as well as the rise of anti-Semitic attacks in European countries. However, as we have heard today, attacks on individuals and communities for their religious beliefs or ethnic background have become a tragically regular occurrence. While the phenomenon is seen across the globe, it has taken a particularly virulent and deadly form in a number of countries in the Middle East. The breakdown of established State and community structures and the emergence of radical groups with seemingly unfettered access to arms, have significantly increased the vulnerability of minorities across the region.

The Middle East, birthplace of many of the world's most significant religions, remains the homeland of many diverse religious communities. However the descent of Syria, Iraq and Libya into violence and disarray has left numerous religious communities exposed to violence. Recent sectarian atrocities include the despicable murder of 21 Egyptian Copts in Libya, the kidnapping of more than 150 Assyrian Christians in eastern Syria, the massacre of Shiite worshippers at mosques in Sana'a, as well as the ongoing abuse of Yazidi women at the hands of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. Such acts are entirely abhorrent. Those and other actions jeopardize the survival of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious character of the Middle East and the prospect for inclusive stability in the long-term. The fact that many of the perpetrators of the violence claim to do so in the name of religion only exacerbates the situation.

While many countries, especially in the neighbourhood, have provided refuge for individuals and groups, the relocation of entire communities is not the answer. It is essential to preserve communities where they have survived, in many cases since antiquity. It is where they belong and where they have a right to belong. The protection of the fundamental rights of all communities, including the very many Muslims victimized by religious persecution and terrorism across the wider Middle East, is a fundamental duty of all States in the region.

As the observer of the European Union said earlier, respect for human rights, promotion of inclusive and democratic societies and support to vibrant civil societies is the only way to guarantee full security and full stability for all people in the region. The international community must also bear its responsibility. The United Nations must utilize all tools at its disposal to protect vulnerable communities and to ensure that those who have the capacity fulfil their obligations.

We must also pay special attention to the role of women, not only as victims of extremism but also as agents of transformative change. Just two weeks ago in New York, Ireland partnered with El Karama, a platform of women's organizations from the Middle East and North African region, in highlighting the need to expand the influence of Arab women as leaders. Inspiring women from Syria, Libya and Sudan spoke to rooms filled to capacity and brought a very clear message with them: women must be included at the highest levels, from peace and reconciliation negotiations, to post-conflict decision-making, to representation in the formation of new Constitutions. We must now act on their message.

Ireland is committed to defending the right to freedom of religion or belief and seeks to ensure that focussed attention is given to this issue, including through our current membership of the Human Rights Council.

Finally, as we continue work on the post-2015 development agenda, we must recognize the strong linkages between peace, development and respect for human rights. And while we work to counter the current series of attacks and abuses, the longer-term challenge to us all is in giving effect to a development agenda in a manner that systematically tackles the root causes of such attacks.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Bahrain.

Mr. Alrowaiei (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to begin by thanking you, Sir, for convening this important meeting of the Security Council. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner for Human Rights for their very comprehensive briefings at the opening of this debate.

The Bahrain Declaration (A/68/959, annex), reiterated the outcomes of the Alliance of Civilizations Forum, held last May, with the participation of eminent representatives of several religions and doctrines as well as a worldwide network of universities. The Forum reiterated the fact that humanity is something that all persons share, no matter what their race, ethnic group,

linguistic or other origin may be. Dialogue is the very basis that brings people together in all their diversity to achieve peace, security, justice, development, equality, liberty and democracy.

The use of hate speech is incompatible with humanity and civilization. Unfamiliarity with those who are different from us leads to hatred, which in turn leads to exclusion, discrimination, terrorism, confrontation instead of dialogue, violence instead of peace, and hatred instead of solidarity and friendship.

Bahrain is an oasis of multiculturalism and multiracialism in the region that was the cradle of civilization. We have woven a social fabric that is open and welcoming to all, no matter what religion or doctrine they may belong to. The mosque, the synagogue and the church sit close together in our capital Manama, within less than one square kilometre. One can see Christians and Jews in Parliament and as representatives abroad. Our leader, His Majesty King Hamad bin Issa Al Khalifa, reiterated the need to build a new human civilization, which will serve as the basis of our fraternity and bind all of us together under the flag of human values to be protected from extremism and terrorism.

Bahrain firmly believes in the need to fight extremist thinking, which not only degrades human nature but also damages the precepts of the Islamic religion, as we can see from the actions of Daesh and others. Men of religion and knowledge must respond to that mentality. It attacks not only individuals but ethnic and religious minorities as well. Such people are being displaced and their cultural heritage is the being looted and destroyed. All of this is completely incompatible with the precepts of any religion.

As mentioned in the concept note (S/2015/176, annex), the international community must assume its responsibility to ensure that the Middle East remains welcoming and open to all — a centre that protects minorities, both ethnic and religious, and allows them to flourish because of their variety and their cultures. This is why we are providing humanitarian assistance to groups that have been preyed upon by discrimination and displacement.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Botswana.

Mr. Ntwaagae (Botswana): At the outset, allow me to congratulate France on assuming the presidency of the Council for the month of March. We commend you, Sir, for having convened this very important debate on an issue that remains one of the most serious threats to national, regional and international peace and security. We deeply appreciate the presence of and briefings by the eminent persons who have joined us here today, all of whom have imparted tremendous insight, which has greatly broadened our understanding of the subject matter. We wish to acknowledge specifically the presence earlier today of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of your great country, Sir.

It is deeply regrettable that the world has become more brutal and vicious. We are witnessing an unprecedented pattern of violence among religious groups, across regions, from Africa to Asia to the Middle East, where people are turning against each other in the name of religion and culture. The beheadings by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria captured on video, as well as the killings and major displacements of Christians and Yazidis in Iraq, are just some of the appalling crimes that have been committed in the Middle East region. These acts of violence further complicate the long-standing conflicts in Syria and between Israel and Palestine.

The efforts of the United Nations, including the deployment of peacekeeping operations and special political missions, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, and the Security Council's adoption of presidential statements and resolutions on the various situations, are truly commendable.

While it is difficult to identify the precise cause of some of those violent conflicts, we have seen that in most of them large numbers of Christians have been abducted, sexually and physically abused or killed; moreover, their churches have been destroyed, and some have been forced to change religion. We join the international community in condemning those acts in the strongest terms. We believe that freedom of religion is a basic and fundamental human right that should never be violated.

Societies have different values, beliefs and religions. They should therefore be allowed to live without fear and to practice their religions. For that reason, it goes without saying that Governments have the responsibility to protect their populations from mass atrocities and human rights violations, especially those linked to religion and ethnicity. The victims of such attacks deserve justice. The International Criminal

Court remains their only ray of hope. We therefore call on the Court to continue to conduct investigations and prosecute the perpetrators of such heinous crimes.

In conclusion, Botswana joins the international community in strongly condemning acts of terrorism in all their forms and manifestations. Terrorism cannot be contained within national borders. Therefore no country is immune from being either the target or the victim of terrorism.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Korea.

Ms. Paik Ji-ah (Republic of Korea): The Republic of Korea remains deeply concerned about the continuing volatile situation in the Middle East. The rise of violent extremism based on religious hatred and ethnic intolerance, as witnessed in the recent series of tragic events in Syria, Iraq and Libya is a cause for serious concern for the entire international community.

My delegation believes that a culture of tolerance and harmony must prevail, and that efforts should be made to foster a dialogue to overcome the deep rifts that exist along religious, ethnic, and tribal lines. We also share the views expressed by many Member States in the Council today that more needs to be done to address that issue in order to ensure that the Middle East remains both diverse and inclusive. As detailed in various United Nations reports, including the report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on the human rights situation in Iraq (A/HRC/28/18), abuses committed by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant and associated groups that have specifically targeted Yazidis, Christians, Turkmen, Kurds and Shiites, among others, could in fact constitute genocide, while other incidents "may amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes".

With respect to such crimes, the Council has taken firm positions in the past, recognizing that those who are most vulnerable, such as women, children and minorities, bear the brunt of the suffering and are in dire need of protection from the broader international community. One of the concepts that arises from that recognition is the idea of the responsibility to protect, which places primary responsibility on States to protect their populations from genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and ethnic cleansing, while imposing a corresponding duty on the international community to assist States in fulfilling that obligation and to take action when such crimes are committed. In that vein, we urge the Council to consider ways to ensure civilian protection while fighting against impunity.

During the Republic of Korea's presidency of the Council in May 2014, we voted in favour of draft resolution S/2014/348 referring Syria to the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity. Although that draft resolution was not adopted, the Republic of Korea supported the need for accountability, because we believed that sustainable peace is not possible without justice. We still hold that belief.

Strengthening the international community's tool kit to effectively respond to the widespread and systematic persecution of individuals based on ethnic and religious grounds is in everyone's interests. In that regard, the Republic of Korea supports France's efforts to build on the outcome of the Summit on Countering Violent Extremism that was held in Washington, D.C., on 19 February, in which the Republic of Korea expressed its commitment to contribute in the areas of education and private sector partnership. We look forward to the opportunity for additional discussions on that issue in this Chamber in the near future.

In conclusion, the Republic of Korea pledges to remain focused on the plight of vulnerable populations in the Middle East and will make every effort to call for increased civilian protection, greater accountability and eventual justice vis-a-vis crimes perpetrated on ethnic or religious grounds.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Latvia.

Mr. Mažeiks (Latvia): I thank the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as Ms. Vian Dakhil and His Beatitude Louis Raphaël I Sako, for their statements. I also thank the French presidency of the Security Council for organizing this important debate on the widespread and systematic targeting of persons belonging to ethnic and religious minorities in the Middle East.

Latvia aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union.

In the twenty-first century, the world is experiencing new and emerging challenges in the form of the rise of radicalization and violent extremism. Today's debate with a special focus on the vulnerable groups affected by that scourge in the Middle East region is particularly timely and pertinent. The unjustifiable violent attacks

of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) Daesh and other armed groups against ethnic, religious minority groups and other vulnerable groups, including women, children and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex community, are shockingly widespread and extremely severe.

Christians, Yazidis, Kurds, Turkmen, Shabaks, Sunnis, Shiites and others are deliberately targeted only because of their religious or ethnic origin. According to the reports, the atrocities committed by ISIL Daesh include killings of civilians, torture, abductions, rapes, slavery and trafficking of women and children, as well as the forced recruitment of children. Sexual violence has been part of ISIL's strategy of spreading terror, persecuting minority groups and suppressing and forcibly displacing communities that oppose its ideology. Such grave human rights violations may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide, as reported by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. They cannot be tolerated by the international community.

Latvia strongly condemns all forms of violence, persecution, discrimination and intolerance based on religion or belief, ethnic origin or other grounds. We condemn in the strongest terms the unspeakable atrocities committed by ISIL Daesh and other terrorist groups, in particular those against vulnerable groups. The destruction of religious and historical sites, characterized by UNESCO as a campaign of cultural cleansing, is also deplorable.

The human rights violations and abuses committed by ISIL Daesh and other armed groups against civilian populations in the Middle East must be properly investigated and the perpetrators for such crimes must be held accountable. It is the primary responsibility of States to protect their civilian populations and to promote and protect human rights, including those of persons belonging to religious and ethnic minorities and other vulnerable groups.

Concerted international action is vital to counter violent extremism. Latvia has therefore joined the global coalition to counter ISIL. It is also important to address the underlying causes of violent extremism and religious intolerance and to implement preventive measures to reduce radicalization and recruitment, especially of young people. The humanitarian needs of forcibly displaced populations, primarily of religious and ethnic minority groups, as well as support to victims released from ISIL/Daesh captivity, including social reintegration and the medical and psychological care of women and children, are the areas that require our greatest attention and more coordinated efforts.

Religious and ethnic minority groups living in the Middle East have the inalienable right to continue living in their historical areas, where they have coexisted peacefully for centuries. Peaceful, inclusive societies, rich in their diversity, must be at the centre of global efforts to promote tolerance in the region and to counter the transnational scourge of terrorism and violent extremism.

The President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the representative of Argentina.

Mrs. Perceval (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): First, we thank France for having convened this substantive debate and for having circulated the concept note (S/2015/176, annex) to serve as a guide for our discussions. Allow me also to greet the members of the Security Council. We are also grateful for the briefings by the Secretary-General and the other briefers, who this morning enriched our perspective and deepened our commitment to this debate.

We express our deep concern at the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation of human rights in Iraq in the light of the abuses committed by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and associated groups, which confirms the commission of serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and cases of extreme violence that constitute international crimes of the utmost gravity.

On 13 March, in the Human Rights Council, my country expressed its firm support for the declaration entitled "Supporting the human rights of Christians and other communities" proposed by Russia, Lebanon and the Holy See, which recognizes the serious threat to various religious communities in the Middle East, particularly Christians, who have been displaced or forced to leave their ancestral lands and are the victims of acts of extreme violence. The declaration calls on the international community to support the deeply rooted historical presence of all ethnic groups and communities in the Middle East, in the face of the serious threat from the Islamic State, Al-Qaida and affiliated terrorist groups, which create the risk of complete disappearance for the Christians. It also calls

on States to reaffirm their commitment to respecting the right to freedom of religion.

Argentina rejects and continues to reject the repeated violations committed by ISIL against religious and ethnic minorities, with their consequent negative impacts on regional stability and international peace and security. We reiterate our emphatic condemnation of all terrorist acts carried out by that group, in all their forms and manifestations, and express our deep solidarity with the vulnerable civilian population, who are the victims of the cruelty and barbarous actions of this terrorist group and its associates.

We are speaking in this debate with a single voice because it must be made clear that multilaterally and in the context of regional, subregional and bilateral relations, as well as in our domestic politics, our legislation and our way of life as a society, my country respects and honours the ethical and legal standards that we view as universal and inalienable, which are also the moral, ethical and legal basis of our Organization.

For instance, we fully respect the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states in article 2 that:

> "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind",

in article 18 that:

> "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion";

and in article 7 that:

> "All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law".

We also respect and abide by the principles contained in the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, which recognizes in paragraph 8 that

> "religion, spirituality and belief play a central role in the lives of millions of women and men, and in the way they live and treat other persons. Religion, spirituality and belief may and can contribute to the promotion of the inherent dignity and worth of the human person and to the eradication of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance".

We also agree with paragraph 9, which notes with concern that

> "racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance may be aggravated by, inter alia, inequitable distribution of wealth, marginalization and social exclusion",

and paragraph 10, which reaffirms that everyone is entitled to all human rights.

In different parts of the world, the reprehensible recurrence and gravity of the terrorist and other degrading acts inspired by extremist fundamentalism and the narratives of hatred that use religions and beliefs as an excuse to justify the unjustifiable and mask bloodthirsty power struggles, although they are nothing new or exclusive to our times, represent one of the most serious issues facing us in the present and in future.

This is not only because these actions contravene and violate the ethical principles and legal norms that the entire international community has recognized as valuable and necessary, but also because the recognition of diversity and respect for differences is a prerequisite for the advent of a fully human world, since, as Pope Francis said, true peace calls for a world in which we all feel free to express our concerns, needs, aspirations and tears. But to that end, the most important thing is that we all be prepared to accept one another other, to respect legitimate differences and learn to live as one single family with a common humanity. This is not a naive utopia; it is an imperative responsibility and a call to action.

We are not being overly simplistic; we agree with the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief that such acts of extreme sectarian violence are not natural disasters or perennial religious antagonisms. As Saint Jerome said, the corruption of the best is the worst corruption. Indeed, this suits some people.

My delegation would like to highlight three issues.

First, we believe that serious crimes, crimes against humanity and terrorist acts committed by groups that base their actions on extremist fundamentalist narratives of hatred, fallaciously attempting to use religion to justify such heinous conduct, must be absolutely condemned by the entire international community, and its perpetrators cannot go unpunished.

Let me once again cite the words of Pope Francis, who, when asked about the reprehensible attacks against Charlie Hebdo carried out in your country, Mr. President, said that one cannot kill in the name of God, that killing in the name of God is an aberration. Religion must be practiced with freedom, without offending, without imposing and without killing. I believe that this also goes for national and international policy.

In this framework, we deem it necessary to combat these most serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law within a strict framework of legality, using the tools and mechanisms available to this body, including sanctions and the referral of cases to the International Criminal Court. We fully agree with the recommendations made in the report in that respect.

We believe that the measures that States adopt to combat terrorist groups must fully respect international law, especially international human rights law, international humanitarian law and the right of refugees, as well as the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

Secondly, Argentina reaffirms that groups that commit terrorist acts, hate crimes and crimes against humanity cannot and must not be associated with a given religion or religious community.

Thirdly and lastly, Argentina, as a member of the Council for the past two years, repeatedly called for and stressed the necessity of stopping the flow of arms to all parties to the Syrian conflict. Once again we would warn, not only on principle but also because of empirical evidence, and at the risk of not being heard, that if the flow of arms continues or, worse, if it increases, either in the Middle East or any other region in conflict, the consequences for human beings will be even more devastating and cruel, and the possibility of a lasting peace will become increasingly remote.

Like others who spoke earlier, we believe that the emergence of ISIL and other extremist groups has demonstrated what we are saying, because it is clearly impossible to predict all of the repercussions of a conflict and the risks involved in creating and empowering groups that, sooner or later, will be prepared to commit the most heinous, cruel and degrading crimes.

Finally, we do not believe that a military solution or the militarization of conflicts is the best or the only way to achieve peace. The evidence bears me out. A genuine, lasting peace can be achieved not by causing more death and suffering but through societies that are willing and able to remember, seek the truth and ensure justice, and through an international community that acts not in order to wreak new vengeance, but to build inclusive societies in which human beings are not wolves in disguise but diverse communities in which we all are perceived as equal in dignity and rights, both to ourselves and to one another.

The Argentine Republic reiterates its firm conviction that only international cooperation can effectively address the scourge of terrorism in all its manifestations within a framework of absolute respect for human rights and international law. We have hope for and support the President of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General's initiative to bring together leaders of different religions and beliefs in a special meeting at which all, believers and non-believers alike, can work to promote a culture of peace, tolerance and dignity for all. I know I took 14 minutes, but this substantive debate to which we were invited enabled me to exceed the time limit once again.

The President *(spoke in French)*: There are no more speakers on my list.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.